

Albatros Aces of World War 1

Part 2



**Greg
VanWyngarden**

GREG VANWYNGARDEN

has had a lifelong interest in World War 1 aviation, and has been particularly active in deciphering the colours and markings that decorated the various German fighters flown by the leading aces. This is his seventh book for Osprey, and he is currently working on an *Aviation Elite Units* volume chronicling the exploits of Jasta 'Boelcke'.

HARRY DEMPSEY has been passionate about World War 1 aviation for more than 30 years, resulting in the production of some of the most technically accurate artwork on the subject for Osprey's *Aircraft of the Aces* series. He has illustrated all the World War 1 titles in Osprey's ever-growing range of best-selling aviation titles.

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SERIES EDITOR: TONY HOLMES

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Front Cover

On the morning of 17 September 1917, Ltnd R Ernst Udet of *Jasta 37* was on the hunt for his tenth victory over the Scarpe Valley. Having taken off before breakfast, he headed south along the front in his Albatros D V 4476/17. As he turned north again, German flak bursts drew his attention to British fighters above him. Udet climbed to their height, while carefully studying the unfamiliar machines – DH 5s from No 41 Sqn. His victim that day was Canadian 2Lt Robert E Taylor.

Fourteen years later Udet was contacted by Taylor's family, and he wrote to them via the Directorate of Graves Registration in Berlin;

'2Lt Taylor and two comrades were each flying a DH 5 one-seater (then new to us) on patrol duty on the morning of 17/9/17 at about 0700 hrs. I was flying by myself at the front in an Albatros one-seater, and had been observing these three enemy pilots for some time when they apparently noticed me and started flying towards me. I was shot at, and turned eastwards to ascend to greater height. On reaching about 3000 metres, I attacked these aeroplanes, which were then flying at about 2700 metres. I attacked, contrary to the usual practice, from the front, and flew with greatest speed at the nearest DH 5, which broke under my fire and dropped 900 metres south of Izel, to the west of the road leading to Vitry.'

Udet then flew down and 'circled twice over the wreckage, but saw no movement. I was then forced to retire, as the other two aeroplanes had manoeuvred into position above me and were about to attack.' A group of Albatros from *Jasta 30* dived on the other DH 5s and shot down Lt G C Holman, who was also killed.

'About 1½ hours later I drove personally in a car to Izel', wrote Udet, 'and walked from there to the location, firstly to inspect the new type of DH 5 in detail, and secondly to establish the name of the occupant. The aeroplane lay 50 metres west of the above-mentioned road, completely wrecked. Of the two identity discs carried by Lt Taylor, I took one away as a souvenir and left the other on

This book is humbly and respectfully dedicated to the late Peter M Grosz, the world's foremost authority on Central Powers aircraft of World War 1 and the author's mentor, inspiration and friend. He is already sorely missed.

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the body, which I wrapped in the tricolour (fabric) of his aeroplane wing. I further possess the map used by Lt Taylor on his last flight, and a small silver pocket mirror. I shall be glad to return these

articles to his relatives, for whom the possession of these must be of far greater value than to me.

'Yours faithfully,

'Ernst Udet'

(Cover artwork by Mark Postlethwaite)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2000 Osprey introduced the first World War 1 title in its acclaimed *Aircraft of the Aces* series with a superb volume by respected aviation historian Norman Franks entitled *Aircraft of the Aces 32 – Albatros Aces of World War 1*. That popular book, which has sold more than 10,000 copies to date, covered the subject with a great deal of depth and authority. The prospective buyer of this second volume, therefore, may well be wondering why a follow-on volume has been published, and does it offer anything new? Hopefully the reader will agree that the answer is in the affirmative!

From the time the D I was introduced at the very end of August 1916 until nearly the end of the war, Albatros fighters formed the mainstay and backbone of German fighter aviation. These aircraft underwent a continuous programme of development, modification and overall improvement, though not without disastrous setbacks and structural problems. The Albatros D Va machines which were still in service in late 1918 were quite different from the Albatros D I introduced two years before, yet they all shared certain qualities, and the unmistakable 'look' of the Johannisthal stable.

Nearly every one of the *Jagdstaffeln* (the specialised German fighter units numbered 1 through 81) probably operated one or more types of Albatros fighter at some point in their existence. It is likely that every successful German fighter pilot who flew from the beginning of 1917 through to the end of the war logged at least some time in an Albatros D type. Even those who flew the Fokker D VII exclusively in the war's final months probably flew the older Albatros machines as trainers.

Albatros scouts were produced in vast quantities, and rendered distinctive service all along the Western Front, as well as in such distant locales as the deserts of Palestine, the Russian Front and the northern shores of the Baltic. Thus, the subject offers scope for a second volume.

Some readers will be disappointed that certain celebrated pilots receive little mention in these pages. A deliberate attempt was made to avoid duplicating information on such famous pilots as Eduard Schleich, Otto Kissenberth, Paul Bäumer and so on. All of these have received excellent coverage in Norman Franks' first book on the topic, or in other Osprey World War 1 titles in the *Aircraft of the Aces* or *Aviation Elite Units* series. Certainly the highest scoring Albatros ace of them all, the legendary Manfred von Richthofen (who achieved approximately 60 Albatros victories), is given what many will consider scant attention for the reasons cited. In the present work an attempt has been made to shed some light on some of the lesser known aces, as well as a few of the leading 'stars', and to share with the reader as many of their own words as space will permit.

Greg VanWyngarden
St Charles, Iowa
February 2007

THE BIPLANE TAKES OVER

By October 1916, 2Lt Edmund Llewelyn Lewis was a highly experienced fighter pilot serving with the Royal Flying Corps' No 32 Sqn. He had flown the nimble de Havilland DH 2 biplane pusher scout at the front since July, and on 18 October he wrote his parents a remarkably perceptive – and candid – letter;

'It rather feeds you up to see all this newspaper talk about our supremacy in the air. We certainly had it last June, July and August, but we haven't got it now. The Huns still keep to their side of the line while we venture over their lines, but if they wished they could sit over our aerodrome (with their fast machines) and we could do nothing against them.

'What I mean is that a DH is no longer attacking, but is fighting for its life against these fast Huns, and that at present we have only about half-a-dozen machines to cope with them.

'But I suppose war in the air will always be like that. First one side has the best machines and then the other, and the side which shows most guts all through will be the winners. During this war, first we had the lead with the BEs and Vickers, then the Germans got it with the Fokkers. After that we got it with the DHs, and now the Huns are a bit superior with their fast scouts.'

The 'fast scouts' that Lewis referred to were no doubt the best of the new generation of German biplane fighters, the Albatros D I and D II. In the back-and-forth arms race which had come to characterise the battle for dominance of the air over the Western Front in World War 1, the sleek Albatros fighters were indeed beginning to wrest back control of the skies over the German lines from the British and French air services.

The Albatros Werke GmbH, located at Johannisthal airfield near Berlin, had commenced the construction of aeroplanes in 1910. Initially, the firm built French types under licence, but in 1913 the company introduced a superb two-seater biplane known as the Albatros type DD – a machine which was the ancestor of a long line of handsome aircraft. In fact, Albatros would be Germany's largest supplier of army aeroplanes in the Great War.

The DD was powered by a 100 hp Mercedes D I inline engine, and featured a smooth plywood-covered

New types of 'fast scouts' were being encountered by Allied pilots in the autumn of 1916, and the most effective of these were the Albatros D I and D II fighters. The official history of the RFC's No 24 Sqn states that the new Albatros fighter was 'more than a match for the DH 2. In addition to being considerably faster, it had a magnificent climb.' This is an LVG-built Albatros D II of Jasta 16 (HAC-UTD)



fuselage – an innovative semi-monocoque structure (invented by *Ober-Ingenieur* Hugo Grohmann) which rendered interior wire bracing unnecessary. This light, yet tough, fuselage would remain a hallmark of Albatros designs. In the DD, the experienced design team led by *Diplom-Ingenieur* Robert Thelen and Hellmuth Hirth (both of them competition pilots of great renown) had produced a robust winner with stellar performance. The German *Fliegertruppe* placed sizeable production orders for this excellent three-bay biplane, which saw service in the early months of World War I under the military designation of Albatros B I. A twin-bay version known as the B II became the standard basic trainer for the German air service for the duration of the war.

In April 1915, the initial examples of the Albatros C I reached the front. This aircraft was the first in a lengthy series of successful Albatros C types (two-seaters armed with at least one machine gun, and powered by 100–150 hp engines) which rendered dutiful service as work horses of the *Flieger Abteilungen* – German reconnaissance, photography and artillery-spotting units. Albatros then produced its first single-seat fighter in the form of the D I in response to the developing crisis at the front.

In late 1915 and early 1916, the Germans had achieved a measure of aerial dominance with the revolutionary Fokker Eindecker (monoplane), largely through the virtue of its synchronised machine gun and the efforts of skilful pilots like Oswald Boelcke and Max Immelmann (see *Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 73 – Early German Aces of World War I* for details). However, by February 1916 the introduction of the nimble French Nieuport 11 sesquiplanes and the British DH 2 pushers had begun to sway the advantage back to the Allies. Even the arrival of the Fokker E IV, equipped with a 160 hp Oberursel U III rotary engine and twin machine guns, failed to achieve parity with Allied scouts.

On 24 March 1916, Oswald Boelcke reported on the deficiencies of the Fokker E IV. 'The climbing capacity falls off considerably at great heights (over 3000 metres). This defect could be avoided by bringing out a light biplane.' This call for a light biplane fighter with a non-rotary engine was echoed by fellow ace Rudolf Berthold, amongst others.

By the start of the massive British offensive on the Somme on 1 July 1916, the fortunes of the German fighter force were at low ebb.

The first biplane fighters of the new D category to see production were the Halberstadt D II and D III machines and the Fokker D I and D II, all of which were powered by motors of 100–120 hp. These early biplanes reached the front between May and August 1916, and began to remedy the situation somewhat, though all were armed with only a single machine gun.

Some German pilots quickly recognised that more powerful biplanes equipped with the punch of twin machine guns were even more desirable. On 20 May 1916,

The pugnacious Rudolf Berthold urgently desired to take the new Albatros into combat as soon as he saw a D I prototype in May 1916. However, he would have to wait for several months before he could fly the type at the front. Here, Berthold, as commander of *Jasta 14*, prepares for take-off in Albatros D II 1717/16 at Bühl airfield, near Saarburg. This machine was fitted with an unusually large windscreen (HAC/UTD)



the technically proficient Eindecker ace Otto Parschau wrote that rotary-engined fighters might still be suitable for interception duties (since rotaries did not have to wait for water to reach take-off temperature like in-line engines). However, he argued that a D-type machine with an in-line engine would much better carry out the mission of escorting reconnaissance aircraft behind Allied lines, and added;

'It would be immensely desirable to have all D-type aircraft armed with twin machine guns. An interruption of combat due to machine gun stoppage, which can easily occur, has been shown by experience with twin machine guns to be extremely infrequent.'

The Albatros D I was the very first German fighter equipped with the powerful, and reliable, 160 hp in-line Mercedes D III, which provided enough power to carry not one but two MG 08/15 'Spandau' machine guns and 700 rounds for each weapon. This was the standard configuration that nearly all successful German fighters would follow for the rest of the war.

The D I, and its immediate successor the D II, were the product of the company's design bureau, which included Robert Thelen, *Dipl Ing* Rudolf Schubert and *Ingenieur* Gnädig. The D I featured a one-piece upper wing and a high inverted vee-strut or pylon centre section. The D II differed in that it was equipped with a more conventional cabane centre-section with splayed struts, which lowered the top wing by 250 mm in comparison to the D I. This produced a more compact airframe, with much improved visibility.

Research by the late historian Peter Grosz reveals that the D I and D II were designed simultaneously, and examples of both types reached the front at about the same time – September 1916. Much earlier, one of the D I prototypes was seen by the aggressive ace Rudolf Berthold. He was so impressed that he asked for an opportunity to immediately take it to the front, and was angered when his request was refused;

'In May, I wanted to take the Albatros biplane fighter with me to the front. We should have had a great number of such superior fighters at the front at the beginning of the Somme battle.'

At the end of June 1916, *Idflieg* (*Inspektion der Fliegertruppen*, the Inspectorate of military aviation) ordered 12 Albatros D-type prototypes, of which most were D Is, but one was D II 386/16 and another was a D III. In early July an order for 100 Albatros fighters was placed, and of these, the first 50 were produced as D Is and the remainder as D IIs. A further 100 D IIs were ordered in September, whilst a batch of 50 D IIs was produced by the Albatros subsidiary Ostdeutsche Albatros Werke (OAW) in Schneidemühl, and these were designated as D II (OAW). Furthermore, 75 additional D IIs were built under licence by the Luft-Verkehrs-Gesellschaft mbH (LVG) firm.

THE BIRTH OF THE JAGDSTAFFELN

In a fortunate coincidence, the very first Albatros fighters arrived at the front just as a new form of fighter unit – the famous *Jagdstaffel* or *Jasta* – was being established. Previously, the single-seat Fokker monoplanes were sometimes grouped into a temporary detachment known as a *Kampfeinsitzer-Kommando* (or *KEK*), which remained attached to its parent two-seater reconnaissance unit such as a *Feldflieger Abteilung*.

Occasionally designated as *Fokkerstaffeln*, these semi-permanent formations provided some of Germany's first *Jagdflieger* with their initial exposure to the developing arts of fighter tactics and formation flying, but had limited successes.

By August 1916, the situation on the Somme battlefield had become desperate for the *Fliegertruppe*. The Fokker monoplanes which still formed the bulk of the fighting force were hopelessly outclassed and outnumbered, and Allied bombing and reconnaissance aircraft were carrying out their missions behind German lines almost without interference.

In response to this debacle, on the advice of Oswald Boelcke and others, the *Chef des Feldflugwesens* (*Feldflugchef*) Oberst Hermann von der Lieth-Thomsen ordered the creation of the first *Jagdstaffeln* on 10 August. These were permanent formations, specified as having a complement of 14 single-seat fighters and 12 pilots. They were created to deliver persistent attacks on Allied aircraft and captive balloons, and to offset the increasing numerical superiority of enemy machines on a particular sector at the front.

In some cases, a *Jasta* was formed from a nucleus of an already existing *KEK*, while some were entirely fresh formations. However, there were not yet enough D-type machines to equip all of the new units, and many went into the field with an assortment of monoplanes and biplanes. There was also a shortage of experienced fighter pilots, and especially officers with the flying and command experience necessary to lead such a formation.

The first *Jagdstaffeln* went into combat on the Somme front, with *Jasta* 1, 2 and 5 serving in the 1. *Armee* while *Staffeln* 3, 4 and 6 went to the 2. *Armee*. Since the airmen of the *Jagdstaffeln* would still, in general, be outnumbered by their Allied opponents, they adopted a generally defensive posture which ensured that the majority of combats would take place over the German lines.

The very first Albatros D Is went to 1. *Armee's Jasta* 1 and 2, although *Jasta* 1 certainly retained a mix of aircraft. The official German *Frontbestand* listing (an inventory of aircraft at the front compiled every two months, which included machines employed as advanced trainers or communication aircraft) recorded just one D I and one D II at the front as of 31 August 1916. However, the paperwork may have been a little late.

One of the first units to take the Albatros D I into combat was Oswald Boelcke's *Jasta* 2. Two D Is of Boelcke's *Staffel* are seen on Lagnicourt airfield, circa October 1916. Such aces as Manfred von Richthofen, Max Müller, Erwin Boehme and Stefan Kirmaier all cut their teeth as *Jagdflieger* in this famous unit (*HAC/UTD*)



The DH 2 pilots of No 24 Sqn had a rude introduction to three of the new Albatros D Is on that same 31 August. Capt J O Andrews and 2Lt A E Glew reported;

'At 1210 hrs, three HA (hostile aircraft) near Ginchy attacked Capt Andrews and Lt Glew. They were a new type. Extremely fast and climbing quickly. Biplane with streamline propeller boss, apparently single-seater. The tailplane was very large and rounded, not a fish tail. The HA kept above the de Hs, diving, firing and climbing again. The encounter lasted 30 minutes, during which time Capt Andrews and Lt Glew were only able to fire a few shots owing to their inferior position underneath, and their inability to outclimb the hostile machines. At 1240 hrs the HA turned away east.'

Although neither side could claim a decisive victory, the German pilots (almost certainly from *Jasta 1*) were no doubt wary of attempting any really strenuous aerobatics in their untried machines, but also must have felt exhilaration at their ability to attack the enemy on their own terms. On the very next day, Vfw Leopold Reimann delivered Albatros D I 385/16 from *Jasta 1* to Oswald Boelcke's *Jasta 2*.

The third and final phase of the Battle of the Somme began on 15 September, and on the 16th five glossy new Albatros D Is and one D II were acquired by *Jasta 2*. Flying these new machines, Boelcke and his 'cubs' of *Jasta 2* (who included Manfred von Richthofen, Erwin Boehme and Max Müller) achieved successes that have been well recorded in World War 1 aviation literature. In September, Boelcke's unit achieved 21 victories, followed by 30 in October.

One of Boelcke's most apt pupils was a Bavarian named Max Müller. Born on New Year's Day 1887 in Rottenburg, Müller was a man of short stature (1.56 metres) but immense accomplishments – including being a prize-winning gymnast. Young Müller became very interested in the still-new technology of motorcars, and volunteered to do his compulsory military service in the newly created *Kraftfahr-Bataillon* (automobile battalion). He was sent to the infantry, however, and after a year of service was promoted to *unteroffizier*, and decided to stay on as an active service soldier. Müller represented his regiment in gymnastic competitions, but soon injured his knee and endured lengthy hospitalisation. He was then allowed to transfer to the *Kraftfahr-Bataillon* in January 1912, where he learned to drive.

By 1913, with the rank of sergeant, Müller managed to wangle his way from the automobile battalion into the nascent Bavarian air service and take flight training. He had earned his Bavarian Pilot's Badge, and a posting to *Feldflieger-Abteilung* (FFA) 1b, by the time the war began. His excellent service during dangerous photographic missions earned him advancement, and a steady stream of decorations. Müller had been promoted to *offizier-stellvertreter* (the highest NCO rank) on 9 November 1915, and his aggressiveness won him an appointment to *KEKB* of FFA 32 on 18 May 1916. There he flew the Fokker Eindecker alongside famed ace Gustav Leffers, and was thus in the right spot when the first of the *Jagdstaffeln* were formed.

Müller was appointed to *Jasta 1* on 22 August, but almost immediately Boelcke's long arm reached out and tapped the diminutive Bavarian for *Jasta 2* – a fact that speaks volumes for the regard in which the NCO pilot

Max Müller rose from being an enlisted pilot in *Jasta 2* in 1916 to a lieutenant with the dazzling array of medals illustrated in this postcard photo. He was posthumously awarded the Bavarian Knight's Cross of the Military Max-Joseph Order, giving him the title Max Ritter von Müller. In terms of awards for sheer bravery in combat, he was surpassed only by von Richthofen among fighter pilots



was already held. Müller flew alongside Boelcke, Richthofen, Boehme and Stephan Kirmaier on their initial flights in their new Albatros fighters. His own first confirmed victory came on 10 October, as he recorded in his diary;

'We were flying under the leadership of Oblt Kirmaier in a pursuit flight against six Englishmen in the direction of Cambrai. We met up with four enemy battle machines which, we learned later, a formation under Richthofen had already engaged. I was flying far out northwards, and attacked the one closest to me – an FE two-seater (sic). Obviously he was not damaged from the earlier combat because shortly he started to spiral in an easterly direction. When I saw that he wanted to return to the front I would not let go of him, and started to hammer at him until he burned brightly and crashed near Vraucourt.'

It is generally believed that Müller's opponent was in fact a DH 2 of No 24 Sqn, piloted by 2Lt Middlebrook. If so, the RFC pilot survived the fiery crash to become a Prisoner of War (PoW). The DH 2 and the FE 2b were twin-bay pusher biplanes, and were thus confused by German airmen in spite of the 'Fee's' larger size. Müller would add another four victories before the end of November.

Meanwhile, a major regrouping of the German aerial forces was taking place. On 8 October 1916, the German Army Air Service was officially reorganised as the *Luftstreitkräfte*, now commanded by Generalleutnant Ernst von Hoeppner as *Kommandierenden General der Luftstreitkräfte* or *Kogenluft*. Hoeppner was responsible to the chief of the general staff for all the operations of the German Army aerial forces in the field. As part of this reorganisation, a total of 30 *Jagdstaffeln* were now in the process of being created with the planned strength of 16 D-type machines (an ideal figure which was rarely reached). A *Kriegsministerium* formation document dated 28 December 1916 lists up to 36 *Jagdstaffeln*, but only 25 of these were operational by the end of the year.

Gradually, more Albatros fighters arrived at the front and were parcelled out to various *Staffeln* – by the end of October 1916, 50 D Is and 28 D II fighters were recorded in the frontline inventory. They were enthusiastically received by *Jasta* airmen, especially those still saddled

with the obsolete Fokker and Pfalz monoplanes. One such unit was *Jasta 6*, which by 30 September had moved to Ugn'y l'Équippe in the 2. *Armee* on the Somme, opposite the French. Just days prior to the move, the unit had given up its ageing Fokkers for Albatros D Is.

One of the formation's pilots was the irrepressible Vfw Carl Holler, a 32-year-old from Rendsburg. A professional guitar-playing folk singer before the war, Holler (known as the *Sänger Flieger* or 'singer flier') had served with distinction as a pilot in Mackensen's Army on the Serbian/Macedonian Front. After his

This group of *Jasta 6* NCO pilots was happy to pose with Albatros D I 457/16. At the extreme left is the ever-smiling professional entertainer Vfw Carl Holler, then Vfw's Christian Kress, Walter Godt, Fritz Loerzer (later CO of *Jasta 26* with 11 victories) and Eduard 'Edu' Ey. On 10 November 1916, Kress was shot down by French ace Lt Georges Guynemer – a loss Holler attributed to the 'blind spot' of the D I (HAC/UTD)





Carl Holler is seated on the wheel of a D I, thought to be 441/16. It is marked with a large black '4' on the fuselage in the first style of individual identification adopted by *Jasta 6*. Holler achieved two confirmed victories in May 1917 (HAC/UTD)

A *Jasta 6* pilot thought to be Vfw Godt turns to face the camera in D I 457/16 at Ugn'y l' Equippe in the autumn of 1916. It was a frequent custom among German aircrew to mark bullet hole patches with small painted cockades – some of those seen here are uncomfortably close to the cockpit. The high vee-strut or pylon centre section is clearly evident (HAC/UTD)



FFA 1 moved to the 5. *Armee* on the Western Front, Holler eventually wound up in the *Fokkerstaffel* at Jametz, and later became a charter member of the new *Jasta 6* under Rittm Josef Wulff. Holler was ecstatic about his new D I:

'Its rate of climb was excellent – it was child's play to reach 5000 metres. Because of its heavy in-line engine, it had a tremendous diving speed, which gave us great advantage when attacking the enemy flying below. Now we did not have to wait long to obtain victories. In short order, one after another, two of my comrades obtained a victory.'

Indeed, Vfw Christian Kress racked up the first confirmed *Staffel* claim on 20 October with a Morane two-seater, followed by another victory on 2 November. He was joined in the *Jasta* game book by Ltn Friedrich Mallinckrodt (an eventual six-victory ace) and Ltn d R Roland Nauck, with Rittm Wulff adding two French aircraft by 9 November. However, Holler also wrote that on one sortie his flight leader quickly outclimbed him, the former's D I being at 4800 metres while his comrade was above him at 5100 metres. Suddenly, a French SPAD dove onto the higher Albatros and shot it down in flames. Holler wrote;

'Unfortunately, the casualty was the result of a technical defect in the design of the aircraft. The top wing blocked the pilot's view for about 30 degrees forward and above.'

He felt sure the SPAD pilot was the famed French ace Georges Guynemer, who did indeed shoot down the D I of Vfw Kress on 10 November for his 19th victory. Only six days later Ltn Ernst Wever of *Jasta 6*, in D I 450/16, fell to Guynemer's comrade Alfred Heurtaux.

The *Jasta 6* pilots soon received replacement D IIs, in which the blind spot problem had been solved by lowering the wing.

Losses such as these notwithstanding, the opportunity to fly a single-seat fighter with one of the new *Jagdstaffeln* was keenly sought by many aggressive pilots. One such go-getter was 22-year-old Ltn Heinrich Claudius Kroll, a veteran two-seater pilot with FFA 17, who wrote on 12 November 1916;

'Finally! Several days ago I received the communication, "Ltn Kroll is herewith ordered to *Jagdstaffel 9*". My long wait has

finally been rewarded, and I am now a fighter pilot. This is the goal of all dedicated fliers.'

Kroll had been born in Flatsby, near Flensburg, on 3 November 1894. On 6 August 1914, the young teacher joined *Füsilier-Regiment Nr 86*, and served in a reserve infantry regiment on the Vosges front prior to transferring to aviation in January 1916.

Jasta 9 had been formed from the *Fokkerstaffel* attached to the *Armee-Ober Kommando 3*, in the *3. Armee* at the southeastern point of the Somme battle line. Still equipped with Fokker monoplanes, the unit

was reinforced in aircraft and personnel from 28 September as the *Jasta 9* title was adopted. This *Staffel* was operational from 25 October at Leffincourt, led by Oblt Kurt Student, who already had three victories.

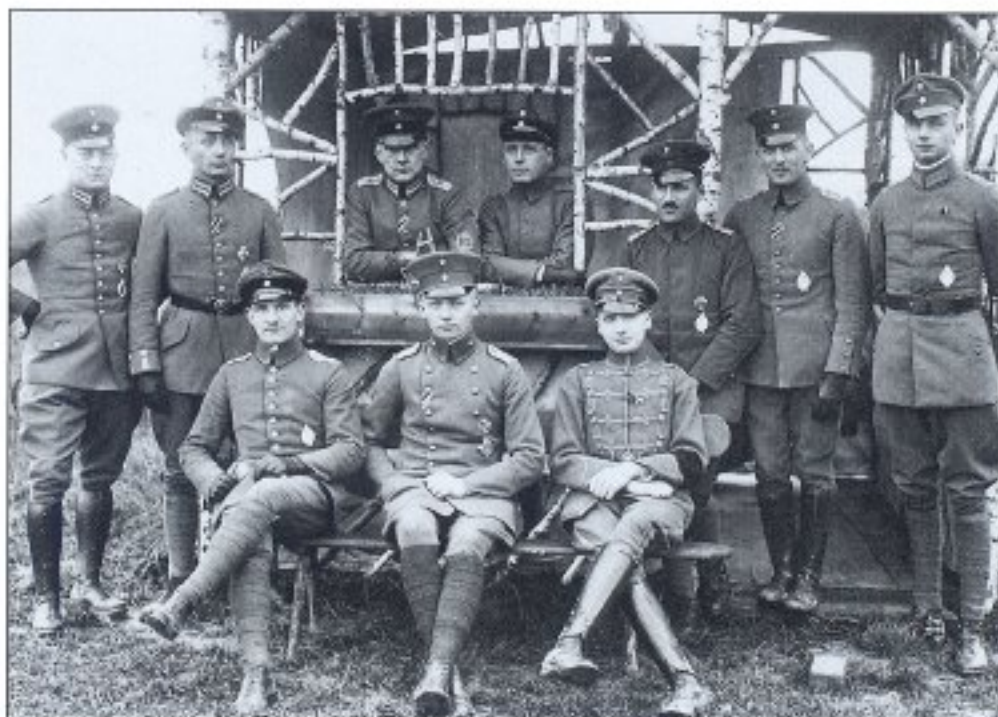
Student had been born in Birkholz, in Brandenburg, on 12 May 1890. He was commissioned in the regular army in 1911 and learned to fly in 1913. Student had taken over the *Fokkerstaffel* in June 1916 after service in FFA 17. Under his skilled leadership, *Jasta 9* would produce a number of early Albatros aces, although it began its career with Eindecker fighters. Kroll wrote;

'We flew from six to eight hours per day during good weather, and our *Jagdstaffel* was composed of 14 officers and two non-commissioned pilots. On 10 November, our unit shot down three French aircraft – Baldamus got one (his sixth) and Pfeifer two (his fifth and sixth).'

According to official records, Ltn d R Baldamus actually achieved his sixth victory on the 9th by downing a Nieuport 17 of *Escadrille N103*, while Ltn d R Hermann Pfeiffer claimed his fifth and sixth opponents out of his eventual total of 11 on the 10th.

The Saxon ace Hartmut Baldamus was born in Dresden on 10 August 1891, and volunteered for the air service when the war commenced. After training at Grossenhain, in Saxony, he reported to FFA 20 on 11 March 1915 as a *gefreiter*. He won rapid promotion, and may have scored as many as four victories in FFA 20. This earned him his spot in *Jasta 9* soon after its formation, and he continued to perform splendidly under Student's command. Baldamus had raised his score to nine confirmed claims by the end of 1916, and was even well known among his French enemies, who called him 'the ace of Champagne'.

Baldamus' closest competitor in *Jasta 9* was Pfeifer, who had downed four Caudrons in Student's *Fokkerstaffel* between 6 August and 26 September 1916. It is not known exactly when *Jasta 9* was able to turn over its Fokker monoplanes for Albatros fighters, but it was probably in late 1916. At any rate, Baldamus and Pfeiffer continued to knock down French Nieuports and Caudrons throughout November and December. Heinrich Kroll, a future 'Blue Max' winner, was gaining valuable experience. On 26 November he wrote;



A well-dressed group of *Jasta 9* pilots pose at Leffincourt in the latter half of December 1916.

Standing, from left to right, are Ltn d R Willy Rosenstein, Ltn Werner Marwitz, Ltn d R Hartmut Baldamus, Ltn d R Hermann Pfeiffer, Ltn Oskar Dankert (or possibly Ltn d L Friedrich Dinkel), Ltn d R Heinrich Kroll and Ltn Friedrich-Wilhelm Graf von der Recke. Seated in front, again from left to right, are Oblt Walter Zietlow, Oblt Kurt Student (CO) and Ltn Franz Prinz von Thurn und Taxis. At this time Baldamus and Pfeiffer were the ranking aces of the unit, but both would be killed before six months had passed. Rosenstein would attain eight or nine victories, but Kroll would outshine them all as a 'Blue Max' recipient with a score of at least 30, and survive the war (*R Gill*)

'On 24 November a major offensive started, and Ltn Baldamus shot down his seventh victim in flames and three other *Staffel* mates each scored victories. I had a Caudron all but subdued when, unfortunately, I received some hits in my motor and was forced to land just within our lines. I learned later that the Caudron went down in flames and was claimed by a Rumpler (two-seater). I was very despondent that this first victory had been denied me.'

On the British part of the Somme front, meanwhile, the courageous airmen of the RFC continued to engage the increasing numbers of Albatros and other D-type fighters. On 28 October disaster struck for the entire *Luftstreitkräfte* when the master, Oswald Boelcke, fell when leading his *Jasta 2* against their old foes, the DH 2s of No 24 Sqn. Boelcke's Albatros D II collided with the aeroplane flown by his closest friend Erwin Boehme, and the great ace and tactician died in the ensuing crash. His death came at an unfortunate time for the emerging *Staffeln*, but his innovations in fighter tactics were already being passed on to a new generation of *Jagdflieger* who would carry on the tradition.

In the nine days between 22 and 31 October (which included five days of weather so inclement no flying was attempted), the RFC had lost 18 aircraft. Almost 90 percent of the casualties were directly attributable to the *Jagdstaffeln*. It is again worthwhile to quote *Kogenluft* Hoepfner;

'If the enemy's superiority in the air that was so oppressive at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme was broken at its end, the merit is due in no slight measure to Boelcke, and the *Jagdstaffel* he led.'

The excellent qualities of the new German fighters became increasingly evident to British airmen, such as the superb pilot James McCudden. At this time he was flying the DH 2 with No 32 Sqn, and had only recently scored the first of his eventual 57 victories. He wrote;

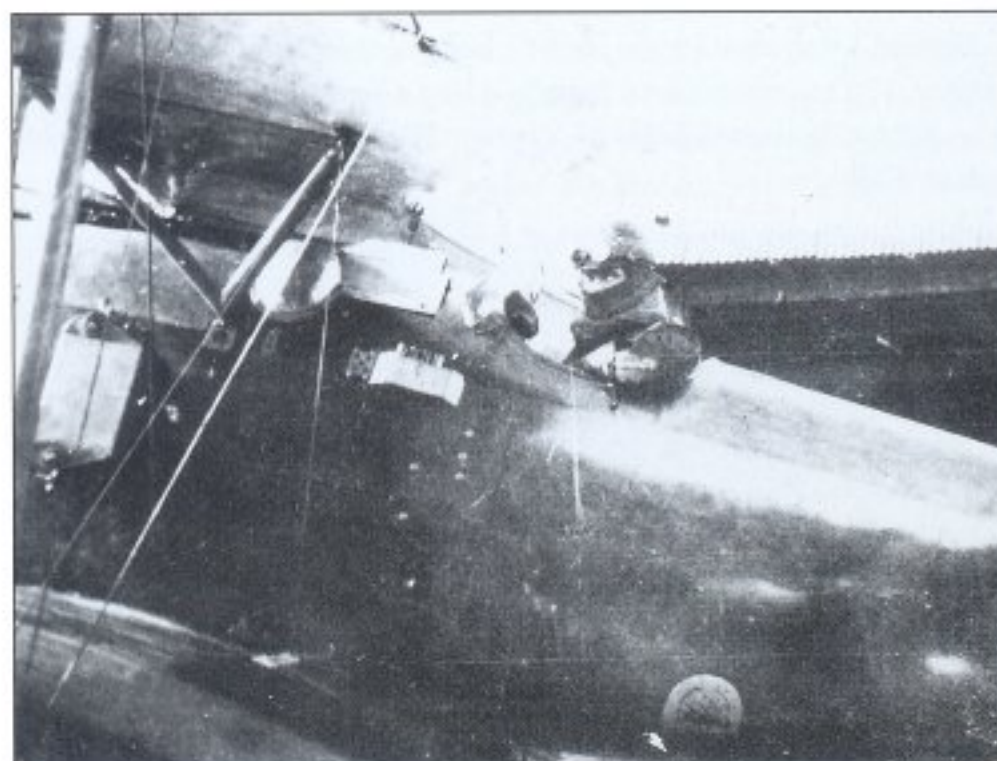
'We continued doing our offensive patrols, but we never did much good, as at that time the German Albatros D I was very superior to the de Havilland Scout, and we rarely had a look in.'

The superiority of the Albatros over the DH 2 was ultimately hammered home on 23 November when Maj Lanoe Hawker VC, the revered and charismatic commander of No 24 Sqn, was shot down and killed by Manfred von Richthofen of *Jasta 2* (soon to be renamed *Jasta*



Ltnd R Herman Pfeifer sits on the decking of his Albatros D II in this postcard photograph – one of a series of publicity shots taken of successful *Jasta 9* pilots. The bulky Windhoff radiator is quite evident on the fuselage side, and a mounting for a flare pistol can be seen on the right side of the cockpit

Ltnd R Hartmut Baldamus is well prepared for the freezing conditions of flight in an open cockpit in his *Jasta 9* D II. His aircraft was also equipped with a rack for flare cartridges and a large windscreen. By the end of 1917 his score stood at nine – a number which would double by the time of his death in April 1917



Boelcke) in a fierce dogfight. The loss of Hawker was as bitter a blow to the RFC as Boelcke's death had been to the German air service, and was symbolic of the ascendancy of the new generation of German biplane fighters.

JAGDSTAFFEL 17

Far to the southeast of the British sector, east of Verdun, *Jasta* 17 had been formed on 23 October 1916 from *Kampfstaffel* Metz, a formation which had been operational from Metz-Frescaty aerodrome in defence of the old fortress city of Metz for some three months. *Jasta* 17 was fully mobilised on 11 November under the command of Rittm Heinz Anton Freiherr von Brederlow. That same day a fledgling fighter pilot arrived at the unit who would carve out quite a name for himself as the star performer of the *Jasta* – Julius Buckler.

Buckler was born in Mainz on 28 March 1894, and had enlisted in the Hessian Grand Ducal Division's *Infanterie-Regiment Grossherzogin* (3. *Badisches*) Nr 117 in October 1912. He went to war with this unit, and received the first of five serious wounds in September 1914. As he recuperated in his hometown in October, Buckler took the opportunity to apply for a transfer to the air service, as aviation had always fascinated him. He trained at *Flieger-Ersatz-Abteilung* (FEA) 6 in Grossenhain, and by the summer of 1915 was flying in *Artillerie Flieger-Abteilung* 209 in the Verdun sector. Buckler flew artillery-ranging sorties for a year before being asked to join *Jasta* 17.

At this time new *Jasta* pilots often received only what little training the *Staffel* commander could provide under frontline conditions. Thus it was that Buckler went directly to *Jasta* 17 after receiving a telegram asking if he would like to join the unit. He did his initial flying on the 'old Fokkers' he reported that the unit still had on hand, but eventually switched to the Albatros D II.

In 1939 Buckler wrote a memoir of his wartime experiences entitled *Malaula! Der Kampfruf meiner Staffel* (*Malaula! The Battle-Cry of My Squadron*). While lacking many dates and other important details, it does provide an evocative look at the experiences of an Albatros ace.

By mid-December 1916, *Jasta* 17 had yet to tally its first confirmed victory. 17 December found Buckler doing a lone patrol in the cold skies over the battle-scarred fields of Verdun. His account was translated by Adam Wait;

Metz-Frescaty airfield is the setting for this view of *Jasta* 17 Albatros fighters – most are D IIs, but an early D III appears third from left. There were several variations of the vertical stripe markings, which probably served as a form of *Jagdstaffel* or *Kette* insignia. In addition, many of the unit's fighters displayed a personal black number forward of the stripes. Julius Buckler scored his initial victory flying a D II, which was probably the first aircraft to bear his famous *Mops* name (HAC/UTD)



'A winter's day it was, like any other, when in clear weather I took off with a new machine – an Albatros D II – in order (driven by my demon) to scour the sky for the enemy of whom I dreamt day and night. The sky stretched out in an empty, grey, thinning brightness.

'There I see about 200 metres below me one of the observation aircraft of my old *Abteilung* crabbing about. And at the same time I see directly over Fort Douaumont yet another aircraft – indeed a *Gitterrumpf* ("lattice-tail" or "lattice fuselage", the German airman's slang for a pusher aircraft)! Without pondering long, I put my machine on its nose and chased down after the observation aircraft. That I didn't ram the Farman remains a mystery to me. I sped past him.

'Missed! What was the meaning of this? I was really a fool! The machine whipped around on its wingtip and now the twisting and turning began. The lattice-tail was slower than I, but my French flying comrade was by far the better pilot. His observer received me with a couple of proper bursts from his machine gun. What a laughable novice I was. Who was to have imparted the knowledge to me? In my time there were as yet no fighter pilot schools. There had been no training in fighter aircraft. One was placed in the crate and the order was "Go up!" Each had to gain his own experience.

'X number of times I sped past the Farman and shot with might and main. Finally I noticed that the observer was no longer to be seen. Where was he? Had he concealed himself? Was he wounded or dead? Then I saw that the lattice-tail dipped and began to spin. I remained behind him stubbornly. A cloud of dust! An explosion and scattering pieces. I was within a hair of crashing next to him in the hill, I was that low. A wild rattling and whistling of bullets! Someone below was shooting at me. Now it was a matter of opening the throttle and getting away! Out of the whistling, hissing witches' cauldron. A lucky thing that was – I made it. Soaked to the skin from the excitement, I raced above the earth. Then I saw Azannes lying below me.

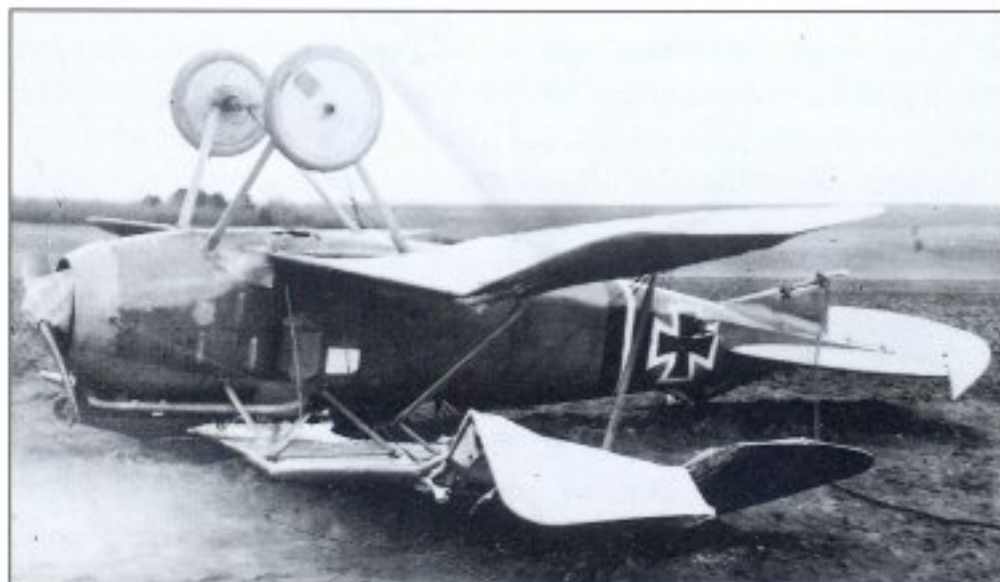
'My first aerial victory!'

In his 1939 account, Buckler professed that after the initial thrill of his first *Luftsieg* was gone, he had depressing thoughts of 'the two brave fellows who now lay on the hill, dead or with broken, mutilated limbs'. If true, such feelings would have been exceptional for a young *Jagdflieger* who had just scored his unit's first victory. French records do not fully corroborate his claim, though perhaps his victim was Sgt R Choisnet

of *Escadrille* C74, who was forced to land with wounds in a Caudron (another 'lattice-tail' type).

One *Jasta* 17 pilot who became Buckler's closest friend, and who was also destined for 'acedom', was Vfw Georg Strasser. Born on 10 November 1891 at Leukerstetten, in Württemberg, Strasser had also been intrigued by aviation before the war. He received pilot's training at the military *Fliegerschule* in Gotha in 1915, and by May 1916 was piloting Albatros C IIIs with FFA 44.

This crashed *Jasta* 17 D II displays a different form of striped marking on the fuselage (HAC/UTD)





Two successful NCO pilots – and close comrades – of *Jasta 17*, Julius Buckler (on the left, with his favoured stocking cap) and Georg Strasser. Both were charter members of the *Staffel*, but this photograph was taken later when the unit was based at Wasquehal, near Lille, in the autumn of 1917 (HAC/UTD)

Like Buckler, he was a founding member of *Jasta 17*, and his logbook records his flights in Fokker monoplanes and a Halberstadt D II. By December he was flying Albatros D II 1712/16. Curiously, his logbook has his first victory as occurring on 17 December – the same day as Buckler's confirmed claim. However, the generally accepted record has Strasser's first victory as coming on the 24th. Strasser described his combat laconically:

'Hellish artillery fire north of Douaumont and six Caudrons at 200 m operating as artillery fliers. Attacked one from behind. After 300 rounds he crashed into the shell holes. Return flight through incessant fire at altitude of 50 to 100 m. Landed in Metz as darkness fell.'

As Buckler noted, in this period some pilots were posted to the *Staffeln* with little training in fighter tactics, formation flying or combat manoeuvres, although all had combat experience flying in reconnaissance or bombing formations. There were several *Kampfseitzer-Schulen* (combat single-seater schools) in existence, and in these schools a pilot took additional retraining and tests on E- and D-type aircraft. On 29 November 1916, *Jagdstaffelschule I* was formed at Valenciennes (later a second school was formed at Valenciennes, but relocated to Nivelles in February 1918). There, budding fighter pilots were instructed in the manoeuvres required for effective combat and formation flying. The instructors were usually highly experienced *Jagdflieger* themselves.

As December's grim weather settled in, aerial fighting tapered off all over the Western Front, flaring up only rarely. By the end of 1916, there were 39 Albatros D Is and 214 D IIs reported at the front. Significantly, there were also 13 of the new Albatros D III sesquiplanes. Albatros fighters made up 55 percent of all D-types reported at the front on 31 December, with the majority of the rest being Halberstadts and Fokkers. There were still 107 Fokker and Pfalz monoplanes on hand, but Albatros D-types accounted for 45 percent of all frontline German fighters.

There were 25 *Jagdstaffeln* in existence, equipped for the most part with Albatros and Halberstadt biplanes that were both better armed and faster at operational heights than Allied fighters such as the Sopwith Pup and Nieuport 17. Although the Albatros' performance was matched by the French SPAD VII in most respects, the *Jasta* pilots possessed the ability to begin or terminate a combat against most Allied machines at will.

NEW YEAR, NEW AIRCRAFT

As noted above, the first examples of the new Albatros D III were just arriving at the various *Armee Flug Parks* as 1916 drew to a close. The war diary of *Jasta 24* reported that three D IIIs were received on 21 December. The Albatros D III was a sesquiplane (meaning 'one-and-a-half wing'), with a narrow single-spar bottom wing, clearly influenced by the Nieuport fighters. These light French aeroplanes had had a remarkable impact on German aircraft design ever since a captured Nieuport 12 two-seater was tested in manoeuvres against a Fokker E I in December 1915.

The graceful Nieuport 11s that outperformed German aircraft during the Battle of Verdun only heightened the impression of superiority. Captured Nieuport 11s were also tested, and found to have a small performance advantage over the Halberstadt and Fokker D-types fitted



Albatros D III 1922/16 was one of six aircraft allocated to *Jasta 24* on 13 January 1917 from *Armee Flugpark 'A'*. The unit's first orientation patrols were flown from Mörchingen the following day

with heavy in-line powerplants. German aircraft manufacturers coveted the Nieuport's superb field of view downward and its manoeuvrability. In the words of Peter Grosz:

'The unobstructed downward view, so important in air combat when searching and attacking from above, was, in this writer's opinion, the major reason for the adoption of the narrow lower wing and the vee-strut configuration for the Albatros D III fighter.'

It is interesting to note that the weight of a fully loaded Nieuport 11 was a mere 480 kg, while a similarly loaded Albatros D III, with the heavy Mercedes D III, weighed in at 810 kg!

The performance of the new D III was so impressive that *Idflieg* ordered a batch of no fewer than 400 in October 1916. This was the largest aircraft production contract awarded by *Idflieg* to date, and reflected the increasing role of fighters in the aerial conflict – and the high attrition of aeroplanes on the Western Front. A contract for 50 more was placed in February 1917, followed by an identical order the next month. Albatros subsidiary OAW would also produce the type in response to orders placed from April to August 1917. In fact, OAW D IIIs would eventually number 838, of which 300+ were built in the Johannisthal factory.

The first D IIIs came in for lavish praise when they arrived in the front-line, with Lt n Rudolf Nebel of *Jasta 5* writing that 'the D III was faster than the D II, and much better in a climb. This is all the more remarkable because the Albatros D II is already superior to all enemy types.' However, the D III concealed a deadly Achilles heel. *Armee Oberkommando 2* reported on 17 January 1917, 'Rib fractures and breakage of the leading edge on Albatros 1919, 1930, 1962 and 2002 as a result of turning manoeuvres and diving flights – the aircraft were able to land.'

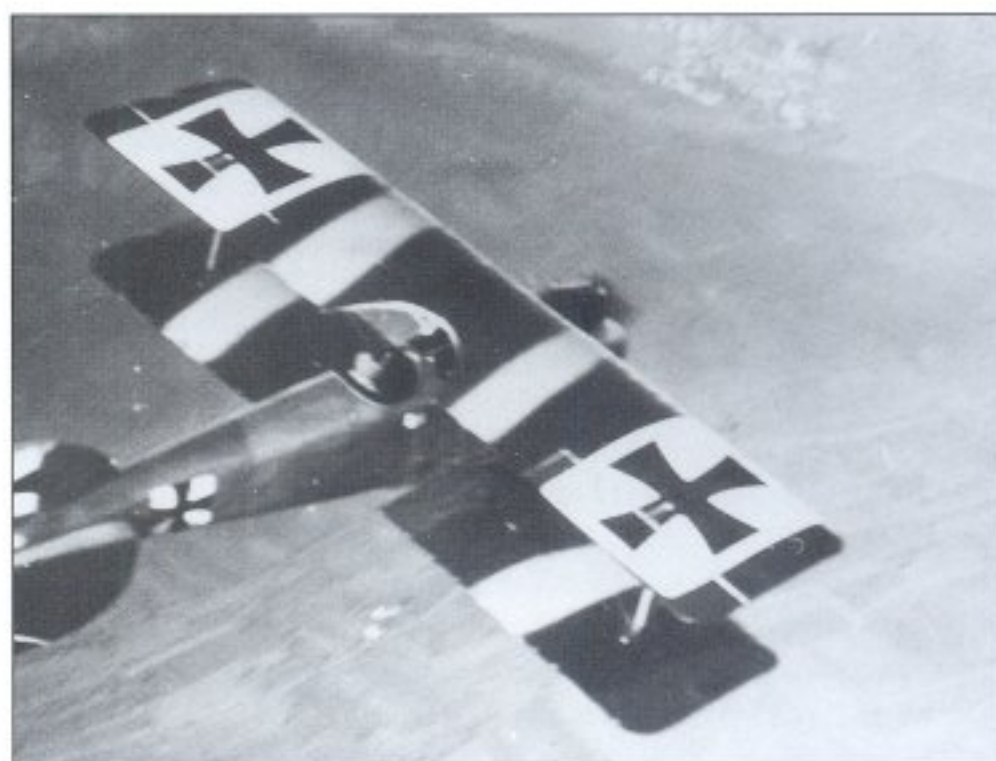
Six days later, Roland Nauck of *Jasta 6* had a terrifying experience when the lower right wing of his D III shed its fabric and then the wing spar detached as he was attacking a SPAD. Although wounded in the engagement, Nauck managed to bring his scout down in the German frontlines. The very next day the most famous example of D III wing failure occurred when Manfred von Richthofen reported that 'one of my wings broke at an altitude of 900 ft, and it was nothing short of a miracle that I reached the ground without a mishap'.

On 27 January *Kogenluft* grounded all D IIIs until the lower wing problem could be resolved. Albatros engineers were already supplying reinforcement braces of sheet metal that gave additional support to the front stringers of the lower wing. Even though *Idflieg* engineers carried out exhaustive tests, and various forms of reinforced lower wings were implemented, the cause of the D III wing failures was never really understood, or solved. According to Peter Grosz, 'the exact cause of the Albatros D III wing failures will always remain a mystery'. Although the grounding order was rescinded on 19 February, occasional wing failures



Like *Jasta 23*, *Jagdstaffel 16* was equipped largely with the LVG-built D II (which was originally designated as the LVG D I). Here, Ltms Erwin Wenig and Ludwig Hanstein of *Jasta 16* play up for the camera. According to the original album caption, they were 'saying goodbye'! Hanstein would go on to command Bavarian *Jasta 35* and score 16 times before his death on 21 March 1918 – the first day of Operation *Michael* (HAC/UTD)

This aerial view of an Albatros D II (LVG) from *Jasta 16* shows off the distinctive LVG camouflage pattern on its wings (HAC/UTD)



continued to plague *Jasta* airmen even as they were wreaking the greatest havoc among Allied air forces in the spring of 1917.

One of Germany's great heroes, ace Wilhelm Frankl of *Jasta 4*, was killed on 8 April when the lower wing of his D III 2158/16 was lost during combat with Bristol F 2 fighters at 800 metres. We will never know exactly how many *Jagdflyer* lost their lives to this structural fault, but Allied reports of D IIIs shedding their wings in combat are legion. How many of

these were due to battle damage and how many were due to structural failure is unknown. Evidence suggests that the D IIIs built by OAW did not suffer as many (if any) wing failures. It is believed that the lower wing structure used by OAW was similar to that used on the Albatros D V, and was sufficiently reinforced to avoid failure. It was perhaps fortunate that the majority of D IIIs were produced by OAW.

In spite of these troubling developments, the number of Albatros D IIIs at the front continued to increase, but they were still outnumbered by the sturdy D IIs, which were more than adequate. By the end of February 1917 there were 150 D IIs in the frontline inventory, augmented by 137 new D IIIs and 28 D Is. Albatros machines thus accounted for 56 percent of all D-types at the front.

The constant expansion of Germany's fighter forces put tremendous demands on the supply of aircraft and suitable pilots. While *Staffeln 26*, *27* and *28* were created in army areas at the front, *Jagdstaffeln 29* through *37* would be formed at FEA locales in Germany. Most of these new units would be well below the specified establishment of both machines and airmen, with an average actual strength of merely seven aircraft.

A relatively veteran unit that continued to perform well was Kurt Student's *Jasta 9*. On 5 February, Heinrich Kroll wrote, 'Many flights being made despite freezing temperatures. Often we are just thawed out after a patrol when we must start another!' Baldamus had destroyed a Caudron from C56 on 23 January for his tenth victory, and followed this up with a Farman on 2 February. Exactly two weeks later he claimed two Nieuports, but gained confirmation for only one (possibly a machine from N31). *Jasta 9* would compile five more victories in March, with Baldamus, Pfeifer and Student all scoring.



Another unit flying against the French, although much farther to the southeast, was *Jasta 15* at Habsheim, near the Vosges Mountains. This unit was converted from *KEK* Habsheim in October, and had been commanded by Oblt Max Reinhold since November. One of its most successful pilots at this time was the young, ebullient Ernst Udet, who had been promoted to *leutnant der reserve* on 22 January 1917. Known locally as the 'Vosges Sparrow', Udet had already shot down three French aircraft before *Jasta 15* acquired Albatros D IIIs in January.

On 20 February Udet and his friend Offz Stv Willy Glinkermann got the opportunity to match their new crates against French fighters. Udet recounted the tale in his wartime memoir *Kreuz wider Kokarde* (*Cross against Cockade*), as translated by Adam Wait;

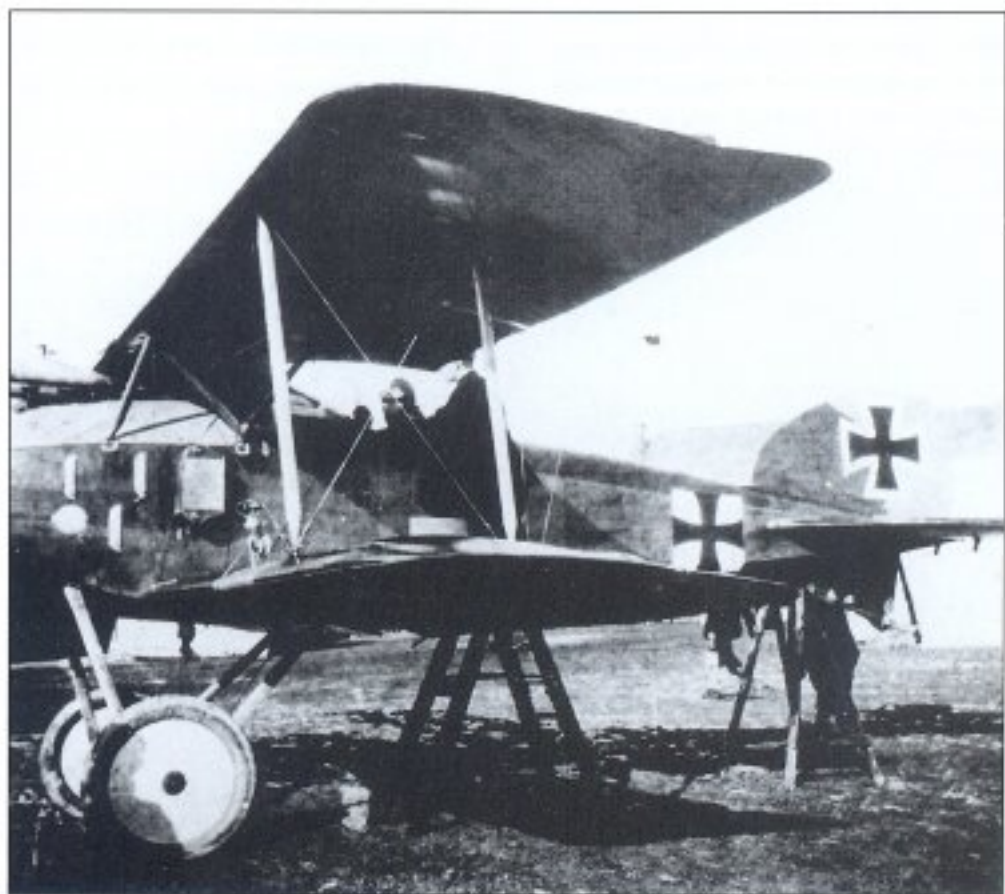
'Recently, the French had been getting cockier. We were able to determine that a new fighter squadron was situated opposite us. They were equipped with new Nieuports, and flew very well. Generally, one no longer flew alone now, but rather in twos and threes. Now one fine morning three gentlemen from this newly discovered "club" crossed our lines at an altitude 5000+ metres.

'By chance, my comrade Glinkermann and I were over the front in two brand new Albatros D III fighters. In a flash we had reached the altitude of the enemy, and thrust ourselves between them and the front. Our attack on the three French single-seaters ensued approximately above Mülhausen. However, two of them caught wind of the attack on time and took their leave in near-vertical dives, while the third accepted combat in a plucky fashion. He flew quite well, and demonstrated all sorts of tricks like loops, rolls, vertical zooms and other similar manoeuvres.

'At a height of 3000 metres – in the meantime, we had already drawn somewhat closer to the front-lines – I succeeded in shooting up

Jasta 9 Albatros D IIs are warmed up on Leffincourt field on 25 February 1917. At far left is Oblt Kurt Student's machine, marked with a black and white 'chequerboard' on the fuselage. Next to it is the familiar D II of Vfw Erich Köhler, adorned with a 'crossed swords' insignia. Most of these machines were fitted with mud guards over the wheels when this photograph was taken, but these are not evident in other views (HAC/UTD)

Oblt Student, seated in his Albatros D II of *Jasta 9*, is assisted by a mechanic on a step ladder (who obscures most of the black/white chequerboard marking). An anemometer-type airspeed indicator is mounted on the interplane strut





Ltnd R Ernst Udet first flew the Albatros D III with *Jasta 15*, where one of his machines was 1941/16. He achieved his first success in the type on 20 February (his fourth victory), and continued to fly the D III and D V throughout his time with *Jasta 37*. Probably 17 of his first 20 victories were attained in Albatros fighters

Said to show *Jasta 15*, this photograph reveals Albatros D III types (at left) and Roland D II *Haifisch* ('Shark') machines on the right. After *Jasta 15* transferred to La Selve in the 7. *Armee* in March 1917, it was opposed by some of the best French fighter pilots. Udet wrote, 'They fly the single-seater SPAD with the 180 hp Hispano. A fast, agile machine, superior to our *Haifisch* and Albatros, especially in the dive, when our wing planes begin to quake so that we fear they'll tear off in the air'

his engine. His propeller stopped. On the strength of that, I approached him, and then saw the cheeky fellow raise a gloved hand and threaten me. I replied in kind, but that did not appear to make any impression on him, as he made an attempt in spite of that to glide over his own lines. He almost succeeded in doing so.

'Over Altkirch, we were only 400 metres up, and it was high time that the fellow came down. My machine guns failed, and I flew past him repeatedly in order to force him down lower, or cause him to swerve by means of turbulence and such. He set down smoothly on a small field between the two foremost lines.

'The aeroplane had not stopped rolling when I saw a fellow jump out of it and bound towards the enemy wire entanglements in great leaps. In half a minute he disappeared into the enemy trenches. The aircraft, a new type Nieuport, was set afire by our artillery and recovered by one of our patrols at night.

'Altogether, I had fired about 500 rounds at the enemy, and was deeply saddened by the fact that I had not brought him down on our side of the lines. I spent the next three days on uninterrupted target practice from the air.'

Udet's doughty opponent of this day was Adjutant Pierre Cazenove de Pradines of *Escadrille N31*. He survived the war to be interviewed by Jon Guttman in 1978. Cazenove de Pradines recalled that he was accompanied on this mission by only *one* other Nieuport 17, and denied shaking his fist at Udet;

'It is true that I was hit in the motor at 300 metres and my machine gun stopped or jammed. I glided into the frontlines, despite the ground fire, to find a landing site. I had just landed in No Man's Land when I was off and running to get back to the French trenches, which seemed a long way off, sprinting from shell hole to shell hole.'

Cazenove de Pradines returned to his squadron and scored seven victories by war's end.

As more and more *Jagdstaffeln* were created, a steady stream of new pilots was required. Typical of these was Ltnd R Johann Janzen. He had volunteered for service in the 1st *Leibhusaren Regiment* at Danzig-Langfuhr in August 1914, and transferred to the air service in April 1916. After pilot training at FEA 3 in Gotha, he reported to *Staffel 12* of *Kagohl*



Nr 1, and was soon flying an Albatros two-seater on bombing missions on the Russian Front. At the end of October 1916, the *Kagohl* transferred to the Western Front. Janzen's *Staffelführer*, Hptm Paul Backhaus, had been given command of the new *Jasta* 23 (fully equipped with LVG-built Albatros D IIs), and he asked Janzen to join him. In his later years Janzen was interviewed by Alex Imrie, and reported;

'Now my greatest wish had been fulfilled. We thought shooting down enemy aeroplanes was so simple that many of us secretly saw the *Pour le Mérite* beckoning us. However, it was soon brought home to us that in practice it was not as easy as we had fondly imagined.

'Following the formation of the *Jagdstaffel* in Metz, we moved to the aerodrome at Puxieux, near Mars-la-Tour, on 7 January 1917. Despite the cold weather, we did a lot of flying, and soon some of us were suffering from frostbite. Although we were so active, we saw nothing of the French fliers and, thirsting for action, we decided to attack the French observation balloons. During our first attempt one of our pilots managed to shoot down a French balloon south of St Mihiel (Lt. Rehm, on 14 February). Now there was no stopping us! Everyone wanted to bring down a balloon.

'It was with this intention that I took off with a companion on the misty morning of 25 February. In the clear air above the haze layer, we soon spotted a balloon up swinging on its cable, and we were able to approach it without coming under fire. When it looked as though I was about to bag my first balloon, I suddenly spotted a French pusher flying towards the Front below me. My companion had gone all out for the balloon, but I turned back immediately, and with the sun directly behind me, I dived down on the enemy machine totally unseen.

'With the engine throttled back, I approached to within 100 metres of the Frenchman – he was nicely in my sights, and I pressed the machine gun triggers. My shots must have gone home, since his engine seemed to stop. Being at the rear, it had caught the full effect of my fire. Now it was easy. While the pusher went down in a tight spiral, I hung onto him and followed his every move until he landed between the lines and turned upside-down. This was my first confirmed victory, being at the same time the first for the *Staffel* over an enemy aeroplane.'



This view of a purported *Jasta* 15 Albatros D III illustrates the sesquiplane layout that characterised the type. Ernst Udet once dived his D III to its limit in chasing a French SPAD, and later reported, 'The wings of the Albatros are not up to the strain. They begin to flutter more and more, so that I fear the machine will disintegrate in the air. I give up the pursuit and return home' (HAC/UTD)

Although of poor quality, this photograph shows two mechanics with an LVG-built Albatros D II of *Jasta* 23 – the unit of Johann Janzen. Just visible is the black swastika that served as a unit marking for this *Staffel*. The coloured fuselage bands were individual pilot's markings. The swastika was one of the first unit markings instituted in the *Jagdstaffeln*, as the commander, Hptm Backhaus, had previously served in *Kagohl* 1, and he had brought the idea with him from that formation



'BLOODY APRIL'

The pace and intensity of aerial activity had increased throughout the first months of 1917, despite the poor weather. In January 1917, the 25 *Jagdstaffeln* had downed 31 confirmed opponents – a number that increased to 65 in February. In March, German ground forces made a strategic withdrawal to a shortened, but strongly fortified, line. The latter was known to the Allies as the 'Hindenburg Line', but the Germans called it the *Siegfriedstellung*.

German air units were given the difficult task of screening the move from prying Allied observation aircraft, and the former had to accomplish this mission without hampering their own ongoing operations. RFC reconnaissance squadrons made a tremendous effort to discover what the Germans were up to, and suffered inordinate losses at the hands of the *Jasta* pilots. March proved a period of unprecedented aerial combat success, with 34 *Jagdstaffeln* claiming more than 150 victories – but this was only a foreshadowing of what was to come. RFC losses in March were equal to their losses for the entire year of 1915, and 88 percent of those were the result of aerial combat.

Both sides were preparing for the Allied Spring offensives that obviously lay ahead. French forces under Gen Robert Nivelle were planning a large-scale assault on the Chemin des Dames scheduled for 16 April – unfortunately, the Germans had captured full details of Nivelle's plans. The British First Army was to play an originally subordinate role, and launch their own diversionary spring offensive in the area around Arras, thus drawing the German forces into a defence of Cambrai. This assault would primarily face the German 6. *Armee*, which was also well informed about the Allies' intentions. The aerial activity in the Arras sector consequently intensified throughout March.

Along with the famous *Jasta* Boelcke and the ascendant *Jasta* 11 (which had been under Richthofen's command since mid-January), one of the best units on the British front was *Jasta* 12. This *Staffel* was commanded by Hptm Paul Henning von Osterroht – an excellent combat leader.

Von Osterroht was born into a military family in Luneberg on 13 September 1887. Having joined the *Deutsch Ordens-Regiment Nr 152* in May 1906, he was commissioned the following year. Von Osterroht had learned to fly at Gotha before the war, and was serving in FFA 18

Albatros D IIs and D IIIs of *Jasta* 12 are on display in this photograph, circa March 1917. At this time the unit had not yet adopted the black tail unit marking which would become so familiar. The D III at the extreme right, marked with a black/white chevron insignia, is thought to be Ltn Oskar Müller's 1960/17. Second from right is von Osterroht's D III, 1958/16, marked with a black and white quartered device. Von Osterroht died in this machine on 23 April 1917



when the conflict broke out. He became one of the first airmen to win the Iron Cross First Class, on 7 October 1914. On 30 January 1915 von Osterroht finally made *oberleutnant* while serving in the bombing formation known as *Briefstauben-Abteilung Ostende* (BAO). One of his observers in the unit was the as-yet-unknown Manfred von Richthofen.

The two encountered a French Farman over enemy lines one day, and von Osterroht piloted their two-seater skilfully into a position where von Richthofen could fire



100 rounds from his Parabellum gun. According to the latter, the Farman crashed, but it came down so far behind French lines it remained unconfirmed. Von Osterroht and von Richthofen soon parted ways, but would meet again when they commanded neighbouring *Jagdstaffeln* during the Arras battle. In May 1916, von Osterroht was posted to *Kampfstaffel* S I, which he soon commanded. In October he took over *Jasta* 12, and was promoted to *hauptmann* the next month.

By mid-March 1917, *Jasta* 12 had racked up eight victories for the loss of two pilots killed and another two wounded. The star performer thus far was Ltn d R Adolf Schulte, with four aircraft to his credit. On 19 March von Osterroht finally added to the *Jasta* tally with a 'Sopwith' downed at Roisel-Templeux. This was actually one of the RFC's new SPAD VIIs from No 19 Sqn, which had one pilot captured and two more return with shot-up aircraft. By 24 March the *Staffel* tally had risen to the point where the unit received a telegram from the 'brass' congratulating the pilots on downing 14 enemy aircraft 'in such a short time'.

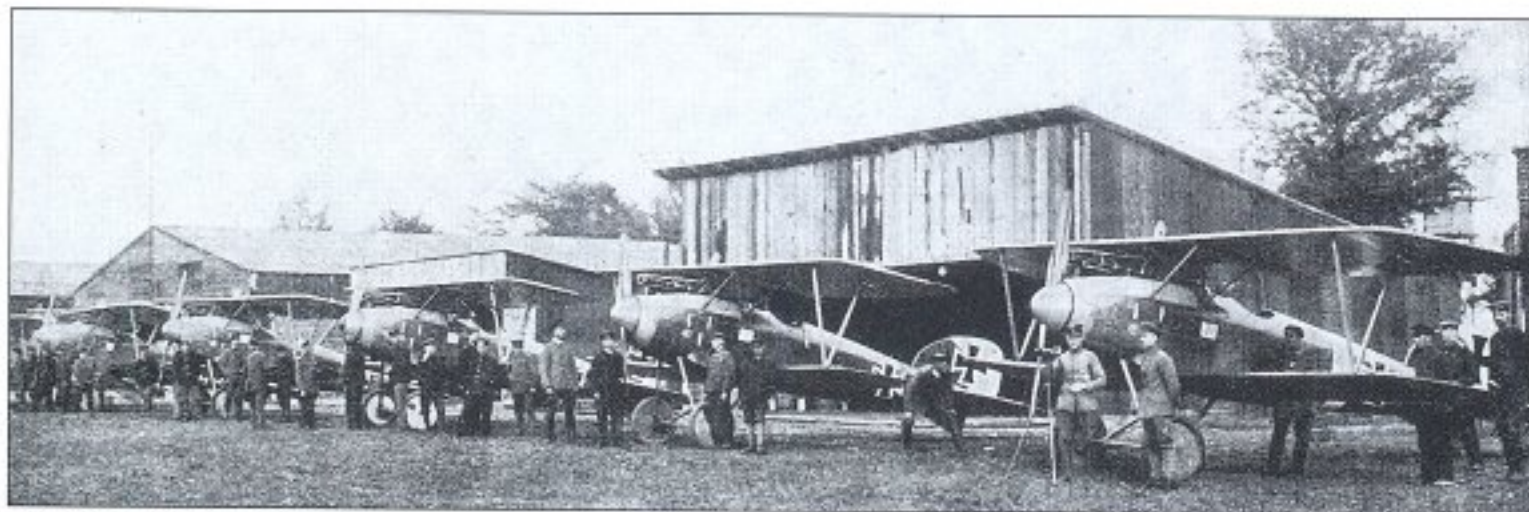
Although much attention has been rightly paid to the action on the British front around Arras, in reality most of the German aircraft and airmen were concentrated to the south opposite the French, where they would remain for many months.

One of the newer units flying against the French was *Jasta* 34, which became operational at Mars la Tour on the *Armee Abteilung* C front. On 17 March ten pilots made their first flights in their Albatros D IIIs.

Jasta 34 was commanded by Oblt Eduard Dostler, a 24-year-old career soldier. He had gone to war with the 4. *Pionierbataillon* of the Bavarian Army. Uniquely, Dostler had won the Bavarian Lifesaving Medal on 21 August 1914 for preventing two of his men from drowning in the Danube. Having served with distinction in the trench warfare of 1914-15, he transferred to aviation and began his pilot training at Schleissheim in February 1916.

Dostler achieved his first two victories as a pilot in *Kampfstaffel* 36, where he flew the Roland C II. On 27 December he was awarded the Bavarian Military Merit Order 4th Class with Crown and Swords, and soon transferred to *Jasta* 13. From there Dostler went to *Jasta* 34, where he and his wingman Ltn Hans Adam got things off to an auspicious start

Oblt Eduard Dostler smiles from the cockpit of his *Jasta* 34 Albatros D III, which was marked with a personal emblem of a white band around the fuselage. The centrally mounted radiator is an indication of an early-production D III. Pilots soon complained that the water duct from the engine to the aerofoil radiator made aiming difficult. At some point in the production series between D III 2215/16 and D III 2252/16, the radiator was offset to starboard (HAC/UTD)



Jasta 34 Albatros fighters are seen on parade at Mars la Tour, with Dostler's D III at extreme right. Dostler is manning the tripod-mounted binoculars in front of his scout

on 24 March 1917, when three out of a group of four twin-engined Caudron G 4s of *Escadrille* C18 were brought down by the two Bavarians. Dostler's concentrated fire sent the first aircraft down in flames near Rupt at 1230 hrs, then he went on to fell a second Caudron near Dugny. Adam's victim (his first) crashed into the woods at Rupt-en-Woëvre.

These two formidable air fighters would continue to fly and score together, and they eventually went on to enjoy great success with *Jasta 6* of von Richthofen's *Jagdgeschwader* Nr I. They would also both earn the Bavarian Knight's Cross of the Military Max-Joseph Order.

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS

On 4 April 1917 – some five days before the ground attack was scheduled – the RFC began its air offensive on the Arras front. The British objective was to drive the German fighters back from the frontlines of the battle, permitting their own reconnaissance and army cooperation aircraft to perform their missions unhindered. While this tactic had worked during the early months on the Somme, the well-coordinated and confident *Jagdstaffeln*, equipped largely with Albatros scouts, would reap a deadly harvest of British aircraft this time.

Between 4 and 8 April, no fewer than 75 RFC aircraft were shot down. The eager *Jasta* pilots had honed their skills and tactics to a high point in March, and those in the Arras sector found themselves in what today's airmen would call a 'target-rich environment' thanks to the unrelenting offensive policy of the RFC. The Albatros D II/IIIs were clearly superior to the majority of British reconnaissance aeroplanes. They were equal to or better than most of the RFC fighters as well, with their most formidable opponents being the Sopwith Triplane and the SPAD VII.

The German fighter formations defending the Arras front in April were *Jagdstaffeln* 3, 4, 11, 12, 27, 28, 30 and 33. Due to their maximum effort, and the attrition that accompanied it, by the end of the month most of these *Staffeln* could muster an average daily strength of only seven aircraft each. According to historian Alex Imrie, from 1 to 12 April there were only about 42 fighting aeroplanes ready for action daily, although this number had increased to 56 machines by the end of the month. Their groundcrews matched the tireless efforts of the *Jasta* pilots, and some *Jagdstaffeln* were airborne as often as four times per day.

Among the various *Staffeln* facing the British, *Jasta 30* was hardly a standout. It recorded a modest eight victories in April. Four of these were achieved on *one day* as the first victories of LtJ Joachim von Bertrab. He

had been born in the small village of St Andreasburg/Zellenfeld in the Harz Mountains in the Duchy of Brunswick (Braunschweig), and was commissioned in the *Niedersächsisches Feldartillerie-Regiment Nr 46*. After making the switch to aviation, von Bertrab flew with FFA 71, and also served briefly in *Fokkerstaffel Metz*. He arrived at *Jasta 30*, commanded by Oblt Hans Bethge, in early March 1917.



Bethge was a 26-year-old veteran of *BAO* and the distinguished *KEK Bertincourt*, as well as its successor, *Jasta 1*. He had led *Jasta 30* from its creation in January, but the unit as yet could boast only three victories. On 6 April – a day of carnage which saw 25 British and eight French aircraft lost – Joachim von Bertrab would put his own mark in the *Jasta 30* record book.

Early in the morning four Martinsyde G 100 Elephants of No 27 Sqn targeted the railway station in the Belgian town of Ath, some 80 kilometres behind the German lines. At 0815 hrs, the RFC formation was intercepted by a group of *Jasta 30* fighters, most likely Albatros types – Capt A Clarke, who was leading the British aircraft, identified his adversaries as Halberstadts, but he may well have been mistaken. Von Bertrab swooped down on the formation, as Clarke later reported;

'Over Ath at 5000 ft machine guns were heard, and on looking behind, I saw one Martinsyde going down, with one Halberstadt (sic) on its tail. This machine was last seen out of control in a spin close to the ground. The HA then hovered above the formation while height was lost to 2300 ft to drop the bombs. The formation then rendezvoused very quickly after bombing, but hostile machines – at least three and probably more – kept up above in the sun, firing bursts at intervals. Eventually, one dived onto the formation. The HA shot down the rear machine of the formation, which went down in flames, and then, being fired on, kept up above the formation, firing occasional shots.'

In his attacks out of the sun, von Bertrab had despatched two Martinsydes and their pilots in just a few minutes. About two hours later, Bethge led another *Jasta 30* flight which pounced on a formation of Sopwith 1½ Strutter two-seaters from No 45 Sqn engaged in a reconnaissance mission over Lille. The attack was so unnerving for the beleaguered British airmen that two of the Sopwiths collided at 1048 hrs. Von Bertrab received credit for both of the two-seaters – none of their crews survived.

Barely a few minutes later, Bethge's accurate fire destroyed yet another of the No 45 Sqn Strutters for his own fifth victory. Von Bertrab's four in one day made his

The colour scheme of Ltn Joachim von Bertrab's Albatros D III of *Jasta 30* has produced considerable debate. Photographed in the early summer of 1917, this aircraft displayed white crosses on what was certainly a black fuselage and fin/rudder assembly. Von Bertrab was later shot down in a D V by Mannock, who described the aircraft as black. It seems very likely that this earlier D III was the same colour, albeit with a two-colour comet insignia painted on the fuselage. The white border of the original fuselage cross has been overpainted black, and the difference in surface sheen between it and the surrounding plywood produced the odd 'border' effect. At this time the wing radiator was mounted in the early central location, but this seems to have changed later

Von Bertrab explains elements of his D III to Duke Ernst II of Saxe-Altenburg on the *Jasta 30* aerodrome at Phalempin. Note that all struts and wheel covers appear to be in factory finish. The wings and tailplane retained their factory camouflage as well





A few of the new Albatros D V fighters are seen down the line in this wonderful display of *Jasta 30* D IIIs at Phalempin sometime between May and mid-August 1917. The second D III in line, 760/17, is thought to be Vfw Hans Oberländer's machine, and next is 767/17 of Lt n d R Oskar Seitz. Sixth in line is almost certainly Lt n Heinrich Brüggmann's D III, and the seventh is a D V probably flown by Lt n Paul Ergbuth. The ninth machine is von Bertrab's black D III, which now seems to have had an offset radiator fitted in common with the other aircraft

name – no other *Jagdflieger* had as yet accomplished such a feat (although six pilots would equal or surpass this mark by the end of the war). Quick fame, and publicity on a series of Sanke portrait postcards, followed.

The day after von Bertrab's feat, the Bavarian daredevil Max Müller re-entered the scoring column after a three-month dry spell. With his tally standing at five, Müller had been transferred to the Württemberg *Jagdstaffel* 28 on 20 January 1917. On 10 April, he wrote to his father;

'This is to inform you that I shot down an Englishman on the 7th. I don't know right now if I can get him confirmed because he crashed in enemy lines. In any case, I am glad that I have had an air battle after such a long time. There were seven Englishmen, and they wanted to drop bombs on our place. We were three fellows, and did not think about it too long. I flew into the middle of the squadron so that the Englishmen had to spread out. It was very interesting how they all skinned off for the front. They dropped their bombs somewhere very quickly, without any results.'

On 7 April Müller and his comrades (including Lt n Walter von Bülow-Bothkamp of *Jasta* 18) had attacked a flight of FE 2d pushers from No 20 Sqn that had made an evening raid on the aerodrome at Mouvaix. Inevitably, RFC accounts of the action differ from the German version, but it seems that Capt G Mahoney-Jones and his observer 2Lt W B Moyes had seen one of the other 'Fees' being attacked by German fighters, and valiantly turned back to assist their squadronmates. The crippled aircraft they went to help made it back with a wounded pilot and a dead gunner, but Mahoney-Jones' 'Fee' was by then being riddled by Müller's concentrated fire. The FE 2d fell in flames in the British lines and both crewmen died. Müller received confirmation for his sixth opponent, and the other 'Fee' was credited to Bülow as his tenth victory.

Equipped with the Albatros D III, and having gained considerable experience and skill in the previous month, the *Jagdstaffeln* facing the coming British offensive were at the peak of their morale and fighting efficiency. On 8 April Boelcke's old friend Erwin Böhme, still in recovery from a wound, visited the front and wrote;

'There is now a splendid aerial operation here. The English come over in huge swarms with new, very fast aircraft. However, among us there now prevails – at least among most of the *Staffeln* – a spirit that is quite

Offz Stv Max Müller's small stature is emphasised in this view as he poses on the wheel of an Albatros D III. Müller had transferred to the Württemberg *Jasta* 28 in January 1917, and scored his first victory with that unit on 7 April



Something overhead (friend or foe?) attracts the attention of Ltn Walter von Bülow-Bothkamp (on the right) of *Jasta 18* on Halluin airfield, near Menin. The recipient of his rather animated conversation – with cane and face bandage – was probably the CO, Rittm. Grieffenhagen, who was wounded in both the leg and jaw on 24 April 1917. The photograph may date from around 10 May 1917, when Grieffenhagen returned to take over the unit again from von Bülow (who had been acting commander). D III 2227/16 in the background displays a dark stripe and wheel covers – markings which were also seen on von Bülow's D III 1954/16 (HAC/UTD)



This familiar photograph truly evokes the *panache* of Germany's most celebrated *Jagdflieger* during the period of their greatest success. Seated in his red Albatros D III, Manfred von Richthofen – who tallied 21 victories in April – is surrounded by his hunters of *Jasta 11* at Roucourt in April 1917. Identified from left to right, with the number of victories scored in April, are Ltn Karl Allmenröder (4), Ltn d R Hans Hinsch, Vfw Sebastian Festner (10), Ltn Karl-Emil Schäfer (15), Ltn Kurt Wolff (22), Ltn Georg Simon (1) and Ltn d R Otto Brauneck. Crouching in front are Ltn Karl Esser and Ltn d R Constantin Krefft (1), with Ltn Lothar von Richthofen (15) seated with legs crossed (HAC/UTD)

magnificent. Would Boelcke ever be happy about it! This morning I was with von Richthofen, who now has been promoted to *rittmeister*. It is amazing to what level he has brought his *Staffel* in such a short time. He has nothing but young men around him who would jump through fire for him. His younger brother Lothar has been with the *Staffel* for a short time. Von Richthofen himself is full of vigour. Even if on some days he flies five sorties, one does not notice a trace of fatigue in him.'

On the 9th the Battle of Arras officially began on the ground, as British troops went over the top, accompanied by significant numbers of tanks. The Canadian Corps courageously took Vimy Ridge, but once again the RFC suffered heavy casualties. Quite a few German pilots were piling up one victory after another in these days of almost constant, and intense, aerial combat. Of course von Richthofen's *Jasta 11* was at the forefront, cutting swathes through British formations day after day. By the 9th, von Richthofen had downed eight more opponents since the month began, and on the 11th he would be the first *Jagdflieger* to match the 40 victories of his mentor Boelcke.

The names of Kurt Wolff, Karl-Emil Schäfer, Sebastian Festner and the *rittmeister's* brother Lothar were also regularly turning up in army communiqués and German newspapers. Such fame enticed aggressive *Jagdflieger* up and down the front to compete for similar glory and decorations, leading some to reckless action.



-AGAINST THE FRENCH-

On the French front, April was almost as bloody as it was in Flanders, as action heated up in anticipation of the Nivelle Offensive. *Jasta 9*, still commanded by Oblt Kurt Student, was in the thick of it. The Saxon ace Hartmut Baldamus was nearing the coveted 20-victory mark. He would gain his 18th confirmed claim on the 14th, but it cost him his life. Around 1130 hrs, *Jasta 9* became embroiled in a dogfight with Nieuport 17s of *Escadrille N37*. Baldamus



Jasta 9 commander Oblt Kurt Student turns towards the camera in his D III for a photograph, reportedly taken in February 1917. His own inscription on this shot says it 'appeared in all newspapers in April 1917'. Like other Jasta 9 D IIs and D IIIs, this aeroplane had a metal fairing fitted on top of the gun breeches (P M Grosz)

Jasta 11 was far from being the only *Staffel* to fly colourful Albatros fighters during 'Bloody April', as this line-up of Jasta 36 machines at Le Châtelet shows. Several of the aircraft had their fuselages painted in an identifying colour, and the 'chequerboard' D III is especially noteworthy. Jasta 36 was credited with 15 victories in April without a single casualty (HAC/UTD)

attempted to get in close to the aircraft of Cpl Simon so as to riddle it with machine gun fire, but misjudging his closing speed, he instead flew his Albatros straight into the Nieuport at 1140 hrs over St Marie-à-Py. Both men fell to their deaths.

Baldamus' comrade Heinrich Kroll (who would gain his first confirmed claim on 1 May 1917) wrote a very perceptive letter at this time. It reveals a great deal about the mindset of an aggressive *Jagdflieger*,

'It is very difficult to get confirmation of a victory – especially the first one! It must be confirmed by our own ground troops, who have to state that an enemy aircraft was shot down or completely destroyed. Because of this, the victory must not lie too far from our own front. This is even more difficult if hazy conditions prevail. If this exists, the victory will not be confirmed at all!

'Then, of course, it must be decided who shot down the enemy. Each unit has its own identifying colour, and each pilot, in addition, has his special markings on his machine. The ground troops know the *Jagdstaffel* colours, and can report if an enemy was shot down by such and such a *Staffel*. Well known is the red of the von Richthofen *Staffel*. If the enemy is brought down, and no doubt exists about this, the *Jasta* agrees within itself who destroyed it. If no agreement can be made within the *Staffel*, no individual pilot gets the victory – it is credited to the whole unit instead.

'The first victory is a very special one. As soon as the proper confirmation is received from *Kogenluft*, the award of the fine *Ehrenbecher* (cup of honour) follows. The second and third victories are really tried for in order to get some attention paid to oneself. Dangerous for the fliers are the periods around the 12th and 20th victories. In the first case, the *Hohenzollern Hausorden* is awarded, and the *Pour le Mérite* in the second case. Fighter pilots try very hard to get the required number when it seems they are almost there, and sometimes tend to be careless and get themselves shot down!

'It was Baldamus' method to open fire first when within approximately 25 metres of the enemy. It is thought that the dying French pilot, in his death throes, caused the movement of his machine that collided with Baldamus and made him crash to his death.'





This poor quality photograph shows that *Jasta 36's* chequerboard D III eventually had its wings and tailplane painted as well. The third man from the left is Ltn d R August Raben, later famous as the commander of *Jasta 18* in 1918. The pilot at the extreme right is thought to be Ltn d R Theodor Quandt, who would begin his string of 15 victories on 21 May 1917 when he flamed two French balloons (HAC/UTD)



Other German pilots had better luck against French aircraft on that same Saturday, 14 April. The fiercely aggressive Oblt Rudolf Berthold was commander of *Jasta 14* at Marchais in the 7. *Armee*. The 'Old Franconian' Berthold had been born at Ditterswind on 24 March 1891. He already had a long record of distinguished service in FFA 23 and *KEK* Vaux. On 25 April 1916, with five victories to his name, he crashed in a Pfalz E IV and sustained the first in a series of wounds and injuries that would plague him throughout the war. By August Berthold was back in action, and he received the *Pour le Mérite* as a member of *Jasta 4* on 10 October. When he took over *Jasta 14*, Berthold soon arranged for his protégé Ltn d R Josef Veltjens to join him.

'Seppl' Veltjens had been born on 2 June 1894, and had served with Berthold in FFA 23. Having earned a sterling reputation during the Battle of the Somme, his career as a *Jagdflieger* began under Berthold's strict and demanding tutelage at *Jasta 14*.

Around noon on 14 April, Berthold's Albatros *Jasta* mixed it up with a number of French aircraft. Berthold sent down what was probably a Sopwith 1½ Strutter from N15, which crashed south of Pontavert with a mortally injured pilot and wounded observer. The Rhinelander Veltjens achieved his all-important first victory with a SPAD downed at Craonne, while Vfw Otto Gerbig and Uffz Kramer were each credited with Caudrons around the same time. The *Staffel* did not have it all its own way, however, as Ltn d R Weigel was killed over Craonelle, possibly the victim of the three-man crew of a Caudron R 4 from C46. Also on the 14th, Oblt Eduard Dostler of *Jasta 34* was credited with a Nieuport, while his usual wingman Hans Adam flamed a French balloon.

On 15 April Vfw Julius Buckler of *Jasta 17* achieved his fourth victory in a remarkably harmless fashion. Buckler's account of the combat in his

Marchais aerodrome is the setting for this fine view of *Jasta 14* Albatros fighters in March 1917. Third from left is Rudolf Berthold's D III 2182/16, marked with his famous 'winged sword' emblem. Fourth from left is Ltn d R Josef Veltjens' D III 2171/16, with an early version of his white arrow emblem just visible. The Albatros D II at extreme left bore a poster with a portrait of the Kaiser! Reportedly, Berthold eventually ordered this removed because he felt it was offensive to the dignity of the emperor (HAC/UTD)



Berthold's D III of Jasta 14 is set up on the shooting stand as its guns are 'sighted in'. Again, the familiar winged sword emblem of the Staffelführer can just be discerned (HAC/UTD)

One of Berthold's Jasta 14 pilots was Vfw Otto Gerbig, seen here with an Albatros from the unit bearing a white bird insignia (right). Gerbig shot down a Caudron on 14 April for his second victory. After bringing his score to four, he transferred to Jasta 18 in August when Berthold took command of that unit. On 18 August Paul Strähle of Jasta 18 wrote that Gerbig had shot a Sopwith Pup off his tail, but later that day on another sortie 'Vfw Gerbig was shot down at 2045 hrs near Passchendaele on a frontline patrol with Oblt Berthold. Berthold's machine was shot up as always these days' (HAC/UTD)



memoirs is admittedly rather confused, and contradictory to the recorded facts in some respects, but it is worth including here. Buckler captured SPAD VII S117 of the renowned N3 (the *escadrille* of Guynemer), flown by Sgt Achille Papeil. Buckler erroneously calls him 'Papaine' in his book, and confusingly recalled his aircraft as a Nieuport, which is clearly wrong. However, most of the remainder of the account is probably accurate. It recounts how Buckler, Georg Strasser and two others were on a sortie;

'At daybreak we took off with four machines. We had not yet learned to fly against the enemy in a closed formation. After ten minutes we were scattered to the winds. I flew east toward the rising sun. Since nothing was happening at the front, I flew back again. Then two machines came towards me, flying at almost the same height. Cautiously, I turned off towards the side until I recognised Strasser and decided to join up with the two of them.

'I thought I was dreaming when I looked more closely at the machine flying behind Strasser. It had blue-white-red cockades and was a Nieuport (sic). The Frenchman must have stalked us unnoticed, and was waiting now for the most favourable moment. There was no time to lose. I dived on the lower-flying Frenchman and shot at him, but without success. A stoppage forced me to break off from him. At this critical moment Strasser pounced on him from above. The Frenchman went down into a dive, Strasser and I behind him.

'To my fury I determined that in spite of all stubborn attempts, the jam wouldn't be eliminated in the air. In the meantime the Frenchman had managed, with an awfully sharp manoeuvre, to get above Strasser, and he now sat literally on his neck. Strasser also obviously had a jam, since he took off and the Frenchman followed him, strangely without firing. Could he also have a jam?

'I wanted to find out and went after him, unheeding of the fact that I couldn't shoot. The Frenchman looked around at me. When he saw that I was determinedly setting a course for him, he became nervous, side-slipped, regained control of the machine just above the ground and prepared for a landing – during which he turned over. Strasser also landed, and a minute later my machine stood next to both of the others.'

In convivial discussion with Sgt Papeil, Buckler learned that the French pilot had also suffered a jammed machine gun, as well as having had his fuel tank shot through. In a custom popular among the *Staffel* fliers, Papeil was brought back to the Jasta 17 aerodrome, and 'we spent a merry evening with him in our mess'. According to Buckler, Papeil spoke of his crashed aircraft as '*Ma Lola*'. This intrigued and fascinated the German pilots, who later repeated the phrase and transformed it into '*Malaula!*' In this way the nonsense word became Jasta 17's *Kampfgruf* (battle-cry).

—NIVELLE OFFENSIVE—

On 16 April the ill-fated Nivelle Offensive launched the French V and VI Armies against the Chemin des Dames after ten days of near-continuous artillery bombardment. The Germans were well prepared, with significant defences on higher ground. The French would suffer crippling casualties that would lead directly to the mutinies of late May.

At this time the 22-year-old Josef Jacobs was a pilot with *Jasta 22*. Jacobs is well known among enthusiasts for the black Fokker Dr I triplanes (see *Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 40 – Fokker Dr I Aces of World War I* for further details) he flew as commander of *Jasta 7* in 1918, but at this stage in his career he had but a couple of victories. Having achieved his first as an Eindecker pilot in *Fokker-Staffel West*, he had added another on 23 January 1917 when he downed a Caudron with *Jasta 22*. In April Jacobs was still flying his favourite Halberstadt D II 595/16, but often switched to Albatros D II (LVG) 1072/16 – he valued the superior manoeuvrability of the Halberstadt, but recognised that the Albatros had a faster rate of climb and better top speed.

On 6 April (Good Friday) Jacobs flamed a French balloon, and one week later he shot down a Farman. On the 16th Jacobs' diary recorded his response to the Nivelle Offensive;

'Today, a cloud-covered sky. In the morning, French forces attacked near Laffaux with strong artillery support. Vfw Beissel and I fired some 600–800 rounds into trenches and forward observation posts. In the afternoon, Wunsch and I attacked a balloon. I lost Wunsch in the clouds we were using for cover. During my attack, a twin-engined Caudron attempted to intervene, but I pressed on with the attack. I spent some 80–100 rounds on my objective and disappeared back into the clouds. Upon my return, it was confirmed destroyed by frontline troops. My reason for leaving so soon was the presence of two additional aircraft (Farman type) on the scene.'

Jasta 31 was also on the French front, based at Mars-sous-Bourcq in the 3. *Armee* near Reims. On 19 April one of the unit's pilots scored the first of his 12 victories. Ltn d R Richard Wenzl had flown in FA (A) 236 and later in *KEK Ost*. He had arrived at *Jasta 31* at the end of January 1917, and by April was probably flying an Albatros D II or D III. On the 19th Wenzl was credited with a SPAD VII destroyed south of Moranvillers, within the French lines. He would travel to the Italian Front with *Jasta 31* in



Julius Buckler of *Jasta 17* flew this Albatros D III 2033/16 named *Mops*. Buckler called all of his fighters *Mops*, until his growing success garnered him a reserve machine that he named *Lily*. The camouflage pattern on the wings and tailplane is quite evident (HAC/UTD)

Four comrades of *Jasta 17* play host to an unwilling French guest – reportedly Sgt Achille Papeil of *Escadrille N3* – who was brought down by Buckler on 15 April 1917. From left to right are Georg Strasser, Papeil, Ltn d R Wilhelm Gros, Ltn Alfred Träger and Buckler. In his exaggerated account of the incident, Buckler mentioned that the Frenchman had a bullet graze on his *left* cheek, but if this is Papeil it would seem Buckler's memory was in error (HAC/UTD)





In this view, Ltnd R Richard Wenzl's Albatros D III 2092/16 of *Jasta 31* displays only his familiar insignia of a black/white band in the proportions of the Iron Cross ribbon, but with the colours reversed. Wenzl would continue to use this emblem on his later Fokker Dr I, D VII and E V flown in JG I, where he would bring his tally to 12. This photograph could easily be titled 'before', since at some later point . . . (A Imrie via HAC/UTD)

. . . what was likely the same aircraft was painted over with a highly personalised mottled and speckled camouflage scheme, as seen in this 'after' photograph. Wenzl's D III was not the only *Jasta 31* Albatros so treated (A Imrie via HAC/UTD)



September 1917, but would add no further victories during his Mediterranean sojourn. Wenzl returned to the Western Front with his unit in March 1918, and soon won a posting to the fabled *Jasta 11* in JG I. There, he would attain the remainder of his confirmed claims flying the Fokker Dr I and D VII.

As the French offensive along the Aisne began to collapse, the British

made plans to recommence their own attacks. At 0445 hrs on 23 April (St George's Day), nine divisions of the British First and Third Armies went over the top between Gavrelle and Croiselles. The accompanying aerial combat was again intense, with several scraps evolving into massive dogfights between dozens of machines.

In the evening four FE 2b from No 18 Sqn took off to bomb Epinoy (the base of *Jasta 12*), escorted by five Pups from 3 Naval Squadron. Before they reached their target they were attacked by D IIIs from *Jasta 26*, and the fighting that ensued forced the bombers to turn back. One of the *Jasta 26* pilots was a 24-year-old named Hermann Göring.

Göring is by far the most famous pilot featured in these pages, but for reasons connected to his later monstrous actions in an equally monstrous regime, and not due to any aerial prowess. Commissioned in 1912, Göring initially saw brief service on the Vosges front soon after war was declared. In September 1914 he entered a field hospital suffering from rheumatism, then transferred to aviation as an observer in FFA 25. Göring often flew with Ltnd Bruno Loerzer during this period, and the two formed a lifelong association.

After pilot training Göring returned to FFA 25, and by the time he was assigned to *Jasta 26* in February 1917 he had claimed three victories. On 23 April his *Staffel* transferred to Bohain in the 6. *Armee* on the Arras front, and he was aloft by 0430 hrs that evening in D III 2049/16. Göring's report of his encounter with the No 18 Sqn 'Fees' read:

'1729 hrs – aerial fight with British *Gitterrumpf* (two-seater) from a squadron of four English. I set on fire an opponent after a short fight with PH ammunition. Burning crash northeast of Arras 1730 hrs.™ Shortly afterwards two more aerial fights with a *Gitterrumpf* and a single-seater without result.'

Göring's fourth credited opponent was FE 2b A823, flown by 2Lt E L Zink with observer 2Lt G Bate. Despite the engine of his aircraft being on fire and his shoulder bleeding profusely from a bullet wound, Zink still managed to bring his crippled bomber down inside British lines, with Bate doing his

best to hold off Göring (both crewmen survived the scrap, but Bate was killed six days later).

Meanwhile, more fighters from *Jagdstaffeln* 12 and 33 waded into the action, and a huge dogfight ensued as the Pups tried to escort their charges safely back to the lines. Four of the *Jasta* 12 pilots – including *Staffelführer* von Osterroht – were credited with Pups downed, but at a heavy cost. Hptm von Osterroht was mortally wounded in the encounter shortly after downing a Pup, his D III 1958/16 crashing west of Cambrai at 1800 hrs. One of the *Jasta* 33 pilots was also wounded by the 'Naval 3' airmen as well.

Jasta 12 was fortunate to receive a replacement commander who was more than worthy – Oblt Adolf Ritter von Tutschek. Born on 16 May 1891 in Ingolstadt, von Tutschek was commissioned in a Bavarian infantry regiment pre-war. For his heroic actions as an infantry commander in Russia, he had earned the Knight's Cross of the Bavarian Max-Joseph Order in July 1915, making him *Ritter* von Tutschek. At Verdun he received his second wound of the war, and after recovery, he undertook pilot training as so many others did. Following short service in FFA 6b, he eagerly arrived at *Jasta* Boelcke in January 1917. Three months later von Tutschek had flown 140 missions, and had had seven successful air combats (by his own account), with three of them confirmed. On 30 April 1917 he wrote in his diary:

'The news arrived by phone that Hptm von Osterroht did indeed die in an air combat on 23 April, and I was named his successor. My new adjutant picked me up in an auto (on the 29th), and soon afterward I was welcomed nicely, but somewhat suspiciously, by the pilots. After all, I was a "foreigner" (a Bavarian) among the Prussians. I wanted to go hunting with my new *Staffel* the next morning, so after I and my mechanics, whom I had brought with me, checked over my new Albatros D III, and I had made a test flight, I retired early.

'At 0500 hrs (on 30 April) my telephone rattled – "English bombing machines are on the way!" I shouted into the telephone, "Get the aircraft ready immediately!" Out of bed, no time for a shave, etc. We dress quickly in our leather flying kits. Outside, everyone is running to the shelters. Everyone was familiar with air attacks which had been directed against my new *Staffel* almost every night. They were almost over us, and very high. I race along the village road to my crate. The first aeroplanes are already airborne. A long, drawn out, whistling sound – I throw myself to the ground. BOOM! The bomb hits. I jump up again, to my craft with the prop already turning. In and off. The bombs are digging new holes in the airfield, but none of the aircraft are hit. My zeal to fight was awakened, and upon flare signals from me, my club gathers behind and we give chase to the *Gitternumpf* machines who are high above us.

'Cutting out all curves, we are able to close in on the Tommies. They, in turn, attempt to get quickly to their lines in the direction of Arras. Now



Ltn Hermann Göring is seen with his D III 2049/16 in its *Jasta* 27 paint scheme in this mediocre, but evocative, photograph. Göring first flew this D III during his service in *Jasta* 26, and shot down an FE 2b of No 18 Sqn on 23 April with it. When he took over *Jasta* 27 in May, he took this D III with him, and it was then painted with the white tail, nose and black fuselage

Oblt Adolf Ritter von Tutschek, clad in his prized RFC leather coat liberated from a PoW, poses with his white-spinnered all-black D III. Von Tutschek first flew a black Albatros D III (possibly 2004/16) in *Jasta* Boelcke in early April, before taking over *Jasta* 12 at the end of the month. On 13 May 1917 he wrote, 'After 60 flights with *Jasta* 12, I had to have the guns on my Albatros (D III 2274/16) removed and new ones built in'. This may well be that aircraft



we've caught up with them. My machine guns have just begun to hammer away when all at once the whole group banks and heads toward us. Threads of light from their tracers whistle past my ear. I shrink down behind my motor and press after the enemy squadron that is racing on a few metres above me. I turn immediately and am after them.

'An FE lags slightly behind the group, and I get close behind him and start shooting. The motor is hit and the enemy pilot puts the machine in a dive. In the meantime, my comrades are busy with the other lattice-tailed two-seaters, and are unable to intervene. In steep spirals, I follow my FE down. A short time later his wing goes into the ground as he comes to rest with nose in the ground and tail high in the air, about four to five kilometres behind our frontlines near a railroad embankment.'

Von Tutschek watched as German personnel took the crew of the No 57 Sqn 'Fee' prisoner, then saw the red Albatros of Lothar von Richthofen shoot down another of the bombers (Lothar's second kill of the day, and 16th overall). Von Tutschek had started his command of *Jasta 12* in a big way, with the unit contributing to the 'butcher's bill' of at least 20 RFC aircraft downed on the last day of 'Bloody April'.

Historians disagree on the exact numbers of British casualties during April, but the numbers are staggering by any account. Several reputable authorities state that around 316 British aircrew were lost in April (another says 404), with at least 245 aircraft destroyed as a direct result of enemy action. It had been a time of unprecedented exertion by the *Jagdstaffeln* in the battle areas, especially in the 6. *Armee*. Richthofen's *Jasta 11* tallied 89 confirmed claims for the undisputed top spot, bringing its overall total to 125.

Like *Jasta 11*, most of the successful units had been equipped with the Albatros D III, for despite the fighter's unnerving wing failure problem, the aircraft had proven itself as a superb weapon. At the end of April the frontline inventory of aircraft showed a total of 329 D IIIs in service – fully 48 percent of all D-types recorded. There were still 154 D IIs at the front, as well as 20 of the old D Is. Thus, Albatros fighters made up 86 percent of all German fighters in service on 30 April 1917.

The work involved in keeping these fighters ready for service was prodigious, as recorded by von Tutschek;

'The mechanic in the field holds the life of the pilot in his hands. Between the pilot and his mechanic there is a mutual trust. The pilot, especially the fighter pilot – who has only seconds to react in combat – seldom has time to check all the parts of his machine personally, so he must rely on his groundcrew. When the pilot returns from his last patrol in the evening after sundown, the work is only beginning for the mechanic. The hangars are closed and lit, then the motor and all the aircraft parts are thoroughly checked so that the machine is flight ready again the next morning. While the pilot entrusts his life to

A mixed group of pilots from *Jasta Boelcke* and *Jasta 12* are seen in this photograph, possibly taken at Epinoy in April 1917. Von Tutschek appears at left, behind the black tail of what is probably a *Jasta 12* D III – perhaps his own? The three central figures are cautiously identified as Ltnd R Hochstetter (*Jasta 12*), Hptm von Seel (*Jasta B*) and Vfw Arthur Schorisch (*Jasta 12*). At right is Ltnd Otto Bernert of *Jasta Boelcke*, who accounted for 15 aircraft in April, including his record five in one day on the 24th (*HAC/UTD*)



the carefulness and ability of his mechanic, the mechanic shares in the victory celebration of his pilot.'

MAY 1917

In an effort to take some of the pressure off the faltering French, the British launched the last offensive of the Battle of Arras on 3 May 1917. The focus now shifted north to Flanders, where the British were determined to break through the German lines at the Ypres salient. The end of the Arras fighting also coincided with the beginning of the resurgence of the RFC and RNAS, as new and better aeroplanes arrived in increasing numbers.

The hapless and obsolete BE variants were replaced in May by the RE 8 and Armstrong Whitworth FK 8 aircraft, which were certainly improvements. The superb SE 5 had been introduced in April with the arrival of No 56 Sqn, and numbers of the excellent two-seat Bristol F 2B Fighter and speedy DH 4 bomber were growing as well. Slowly, the momentum of dominance was swinging back to the Allies, but the *Jasta* pilots were still an experienced and confident force to be reckoned with.

Württemberg *Jagdstaffel* 28 had been engaged in the Arras fighting, but had managed to score only two victories under its first lacklustre commander, Oblt Lang. On 28 April, Lang was replaced by one of von Richthofen's protégés, Lt n Karl-Emil Schäfer. The 25-year-old Westphalian arrived with a stunning 24 victories under his belt, and brand new decorations of the 'Hohenzollern' and the *Pour le Mérite* on his tunic. He also brought his largely red D III with him from *Jasta* 11, and his charismatic leadership energised the *Staffel* in lightning fashion.

Two days after Schäfer's arrival, the diminutive Bavarian NCO Max Müller tallied the third claim for the *Jasta*, and on the first day of May Schäfer himself added two more to bring his unit's total to five. The British pilots of No 1 Sqn who encountered Schäfer that day recounted that the enemy leader flew an Albatros that was 'painted bright red, with an exceptionally good pilot', and that 'his machine was superior in every way to the Nieuport'. Three days later, the young *Staffelführer* wrote his father a letter (translated by Peter Kilduff);

'I am now in charge of a new assignment, which is a task the like of which I have so far never encountered. I hope and believe that I am up to the task. *Staffel* 28 is filled with good pilots. Two British shot down in the months before my time until now. During the four days of my leadership we brought down four – prospects are good.'

On 10 May Schäfer wrote;

'The work here would be like a vacation at the von Richthofen *Staffel*. Yesterday, I again shot one down – number 26. Before, with three shot down within 14 days, I would have been considered to be quite a wary, spineless dog – here, one is happy when one makes three flights and sees an Englishman.'

Like many other units, *Jasta* 28 seemingly still lacked sufficient aircraft, but Schäfer's great example spurred Max Müller on to stellar achievements. On 11 May Müller wrote;

'On the 7th I shot down my ninth Englishman. Yesterday, I had a very dangerous Englishman already down to 1500 m far behind our front. I was then attacked by a Nieuport single-seater and had to let go of the

other one. Temporarily, we still have very few machines, which is why I am off duty every third day.'

The growing strength of the RFC, as well as the superiority of their new aircraft, is reflected in Müller's next letter, written five days later;

'I would like to ask for leave now but you know, the Englishmen have become very impudent of late so that Ltn Schäfer would not let me go at this time. It was interesting how I shot down my tenth victory. I was attacking three artillery aircraft with three other gentlemen. The one attacked by me fell like a sheet of paper, making loops several times. While the machine was going down, the observer and pilot fell out. They have been found 3500 metres away from the crashed machine. The English aircraft, a very new type (an RE 8), fell in our frontlines. Honestly, for me the whole thing has been a tragedy.'

On the French front, the Nivelle debacle had officially terminated on 20 May, but the aerial conflict had remained intense. *Jasta 15*, at La Selve on the 7. *Armee* front, had been engaged in hot combat against French fighters for some time. On 24 April Ernst Udet had downed a Nieuport to bring his tally to five, but two days later his commander, Oblt Max Reinhold, was killed over Lierval – ironically, his failure to return from a flight spoiled the celebration of Udet's 21st birthday. Reinhold's replacement was famed balloon-buster Ltn d R Heinrich Gontermann (see *Osprey Aircraft of the Aces 66 – Balloon-Busting Aces of World War I* for further details) from *Jasta 5*. Gontermann was an accomplished ace, but also a devoutly religious leader of firm moral convictions. Udet wrote;

'Before he opens fire, he defeats his enemy by outflying him. When he finally fires, he requires, at most, a dozen rounds to tear apart the other's machine. He exudes great calm. His broad farmer's face rarely exhibits the least bit of emotion. He is a profound believer.'

On 4 May Gontermann downed a SPAD, and the very next day Udet duplicated this feat, most likely wounding the 21-victory commander of Guynemer's N3, Capitaine Alfred Heurtaux, in the process. Gontermann continued his rampage for the next two weeks, successfully claiming four more aircraft by the 11th to bring his own score to 21. His 'Blue Max' followed three days later, and he duly left on the customary four weeks' leave soon after, naming Udet as acting leader of *Jasta 15*.

Udet's first command proved to be a tragic period for the *Staffel*. On 25 May Vfw Müller was killed, and the very next day a patrol led by Udet was bounced by a SPAD coming out of the sun. Udet watched in horror as his friend Ltn d R Eberhard 'Puz' Hänisch's Albatros burst into flames. Udet dived after the SPAD but had to give up the chase when the wings of his D III began to shudder alarmingly. Only three days later, the acting *Staffelführer* lost another close comrade when Willy Glinkermann was killed near Orgeval. Then, on 4 June, Vfw Eichenauer was lost.

Ltn d R Heinrich Gontermann is all bundled up for take-off in his *Jasta 5* D III, probably 2243/16 – it displays a mottled camouflage finish.

Gontermann destroyed five enemy aircraft and six balloons in April 1917. On the last day of the month he took over *Jasta 15*, and was a mentor to Ernst Udet. Gontermann was the grandson of a Lutheran pastor, and was profoundly religious (HAC/UTD)



It was at some point during this period that Udet reportedly had his famous duel with Guynemer, the German ace writing that his celebrated French opponent chivalrously refrained from killing him after he had seen Udet hammering helplessly on his jammed guns. Whether true or not, Udet was so unnerved by *Jasta 15's* losses that he asked Gontermann to grant him a transfer out of the *Staffel* when the balloon-busting ace returned from his leave on 19 June.

Jasta 34 had also been in action against the French in late May 1917, Oblt Dostler leading a late morning patrol down on a mixed group of eight SPADs and Nieuports on the 24th. He succeeded in bringing down a Nieuport (probably flown by Sgt Ferret of N90) as his seventh confirmed victory. In the same scrap fellow *Jasta 34* pilot Oblt Robert Greim claimed a SPAD, but this was only credited as 'forced to land in French lines', and thus did not count as a full *Luftsieg*.

Greim was a 24-year-old from Bayreuth who had gone to war with a Bavarian field artillery regiment. In 1915 he joined FFA 3b as an observer with no training whatsoever, but on 10 October he achieved the rare distinction of a confirmed victory over a Farman. After flight training, Greim flew with FA 46b, until his posting to *Jasta 34* on 4 April 1917. His disappointment over having been denied an official victory on 24 May was relieved the next day when he received confirmation for a Caudron shot down near Charnot Forest as his second victory. Greim would go on to win the 'Blue Max', rise to the command of *Jasta 34* (which became a Bavarian unit in July 1917) and survive the war with at least 28 victories. His erstwhile commander Eduard Ritter von Dostler was not so lucky, for he was killed whilst leading *Jasta 6* on 21 August 1917.

On that same 25 May that Greim claimed his first victory with *Jasta 34*, Heinrich Kroll of *Jasta 9* dealt a devastating blow to French fighter aviation. After his initial victory on 1 May, Kroll had a run of successful combats that saw him down two SPADs on 7 May, followed by another on the 20th. On 11 June Kroll wrote to his parents with the following news (in the original transcript of this letter, the date of the combat was mistakenly transcribed as 23 May, when it was actually the 25th):

"Today I received good news! On 23 May (sic) I had brought down the fourth-best French pilot, René Dorme, who, on 17 April, brought down his 19th and 20th victories, and his 22nd victim a few days ago. I shot him down near Fort la Pompelle, by Reims. It was a very hot circling fight that started at 5300 metres and lasted down to 800 metres. He suddenly dived vertically and burst into flames when he hit the ground. Dorme's identity was confirmed by means of a watch with an inscription on the cover."

Some sources have credited Eduard Schleich, the Bavarian commander of *Jasta 21*, as being the victor over Dorme. However, the available evidence strongly points to Kroll as the actual victor over the celebrated SPAD ace from N3, the famous 'les Cigognes'.



Oblt Robert Greim of *Jasta 34* strikes a dramatic pose with D III 2108/16. Greim was flying with his CO, Oblt Dostler, when they engaged French fighters on 24 May 1917. Dostler despatched a Nieuport, but Greim's claim for a SPAD was only credited as forced to land. He made up for this the next day by downing a Caudron for his second confirmed claim

Robert Greim looks a bit sheepish in this shot of his D III 643/17, and little wonder. He damaged his Albatros by running into what appears to be an outdoor privy in a rather spacious field! This photograph was most likely taken in the summer of 1917, and shows a dark disc marked on the fuselage of the D III as a personal emblem. Again, the camouflage pattern is noteworthy (HAC/UTD)



MAXIMUM EFFORT

Between April and August 1917, Albatros subsidiary OAW in Schneidemühl received five contracts for mass production of 840 Albatros D III machines – in fact, production of the D III was maintained until September 1917. At Johannisthal, meanwhile, plans for a replacement for the D III had been underway since April. At that time an order was placed for 200 D V aircraft, and these machines were intended to be ready to equip 37 *Jasta* by the early summer.

Idflieg described the new D V as having a 'lightened Albatros D III airframe'. The D V featured a redesigned fuselage of oval or elliptical cross-section, and the tailskid fin was slightly altered. This produced a machine of beautifully streamlined appearance. Although the wings looked identical in form to those of the D III, they were in fact different in a few significant ways. The aileron cables were now routed through the top wing, and the gap between the wings was reduced by some 110 mm. Furthermore, the altered fuselage profile necessitated a change in the fuselage-wing interface. These wing changes were seemingly ignored by *Idflieg* engineers during the static-load testing of the new aircraft. In fact *Idflieg* tested only the fuselage (which weighed about 50 kg less than that of the D III) and the rudder.

Perhaps in part because of this negligence in the testing programme, the deadly problem of wing failures once again reared its head soon after the first D Vs reached the front in May 1917. *Idflieg* records indicate that the upper wing was soon being load tested due to 'failure of wing tips in the field'. In fact, despite strenuous testing and design studies by some of Germany's top aeronautical engineers, the wing failure difficulties were never really understood, nor solved.

The tendency of the outboard sections of the upper wing to fail was partially mitigated by the use of extra bracing cables to the centre of the overhanging portion. In addition, small bracing struts were frequently fitted from a point just above the base of the interplane strut to the wing leading edge. This was due to the belief that the single spar of the lower wing was too far aft of the leading edge.

Such structural problems did not, however, prevent mass production of the D V. In addition to the 200 ordered in April, a contract for a further 400 was awarded in May and 300 more were ordered in July. However, *Idflieg* reported on 24 July 1917 that 'The Albatros D III is more robustly built than the D V. The D V can merely be considered a lightened D III, as their performance is about equal. The D V will not be produced further, just the D III.' In truth, the last batch of 140 D IIIs was ordered from OAW just one month after the last D V batch.

Production of the D V was apparently continued even after the wing failure problems surfaced because of the tremendous demand for fighter aircraft. On 23 June 1917, a plan known as the *Amerikaprogramm* was put forward to the Army High Command by *Kogenluft*. It was envisaged that the weight of American industry and manpower would begin to make an impact on the aerial war by early 1918. As a response



This superb view of Karl-Emil Schäfer shows him with his newly won *Pour le Mérite* just after taking over Württemberg Jasta 28. His award of the 'Blue Max' had come through on 27 April, but the news did not reach him for three days, by which time Schäfer had already transferred to his new *Staffel*. He may have brought this D III with him from Jasta 11, and the aircraft had a largely red fuselage. Schäfer had previously flown a D III with a yellowish natural-varnished ply fuselage and a black tail. In mid-April his aircraft was overpainted mostly red in common with other Jasta 11 D IIIs, but it reportedly retained a black tail section. The D III seen here does display a subtle tonal difference on the fuselage ahead of the cross, but it is unwise to speculate too much on its precise markings. What is certain is that Schäfer's aircraft left a vivid impression of a 'red Albatros' on more than one RFC opponent (photo courtesy L. Bronnenkant)

to this, the *Amerikaprogramm* called for the creation of 40 new *Jagdstaffeln* (doubling the number then in existence) and 17 new *Flieger Abteilungen* (A), or artillery-spotting units. The plan also called for the creation of a second *Jagdstaffelschule*, 24,000 new recruits for the service and the associated increase in the production of aircraft and aero engines.

The Albatros firm, which had an impressive production capacity of 190 airframes per month, had

already geared up for D V production, and enjoyed something of a fighter monopoly at this time. By 30 June 1917 there were 216 D Vs reported in the frontline inventory, as well as 303 D IIIs and 107 of the old D Is and D IIs. In total, Albatros fighters accounted for almost 72 percent of all D-types at the front.

After the complete collapse of the Nivelle Offensive on the Aisne and the subsequent French mutinies, the main theatre of Allied offensive operations was shifted north to Flanders, where the brunt of the effort around Ypres fell on the British Second Army. The objective of the planned assaults was to drive the Germans from the Belgian coast and turn their flank. Before this could be accomplished, it was considered necessary that the high ground of the Messines-Wytschaete ridge be taken. The German 4. *Armee* held the line in the Messines Ridge area, and consequently its number of *Jagdstaffeln* was increased from four to nine.

Jasta 28, commanded by the redoubtable Karl-Emil Schäfer, was already located at Wasquehal in the 4. *Armee*, and it would be in the thick of the battle for Messines Ridge. On 3 June, the ambitious Max Müller destroyed a Sopwith 1½ Strutter from No 45 Sqn for his 14th confirmed *Luftsieg*. It seems possible from his letters that the Bavarian felt resentment at what he perceived as discrimination because of his NCO status. At this time, an officer with ten or more victories would probably have been put in for the 'Hohenzollern', whereas an enlisted pilot would likely receive no comparable award. On 26 May Müller had written;

'The day before yesterday I despatched my 12th Englishman. Yes, actually you are right. One doesn't get anything by way of thanks. Should I be fortunate and become an officer in the end, then that would be good for me.'

On 4 June Schäfer brought down a DH 4 of No 55 Sqn for his 30th victory. Earlier that day he had been involved in a scrap with a large number of British fighters, and had targeted the Nieuport of No 1 Sqn ace Capt Philip Fullard. However, Schäfer was then jumped by SE 5s from No 56 Sqn, and ace Lt A P F Rhys Davids reported that the leader of the German formation flew an Albatros with a red fuselage, and that he 'manoeuvred very well'. Rhys Davids also wrote about the engagement in a letter to his mother, explaining that 'for about half-an-hour I played "tic" with five of them, led by an extremely good pilot in a red, pink and grey machine. I wanted to go up close and watch his flying, instead of scrapping.'



The end of an ace. Meticulous research by historian Lance Bronnenkant and others has confirmed that this grim view is the final photograph of Karl-Emil Schäfer's body amid the wreckage of his Albatros D III. Schäfer fell on 5 June 1917 following combat with FE 2d fighters of No 20 Sqn (HAC/UTD)

This colourful array of D IIIs and D V fighters of *Jasta 28* at Varssenaere aerodrome in the summer of 1917 reveals a variety of coloured fuselages. All these machines display the *Staffel* marking of yellow tailplanes with two black stripes, which had been instituted by late June 1917 (HAC/UTD)

The charismatic leader of *Jasta 28* had achieved his final success, however. On 6 June Max Müller wrote;

'Lt n Schäfer, a man like Boelcke, paid with his life yesterday afternoon. What happened was this – Lt n Schäfer had given me his extra machine so I could fly with him without reservation. For a long time the Englishmen had been planning to destroy the red aircraft. Here, Lt n Schäfer was mistaken for von Richthofen. I am also feared here, therefore my machine is being painted differently every 14 days.'

'Lt n Schäfer was the leader of our flight against eight Englishmen. I

myself was attacking from above – that's the best way to attack. Lt n Schäfer was attacking with six other gentlemen from the same height. He had almost brought down one Englishman when he was attacked by three more from the rear and above. I came to his assistance but it was too late. Lt n Schäfer's machine broke up and crashed vertically. The other gentlemen did not attack vigorously enough – they are not as yet proficient enough. It could also be that a cable had been severed or shot off. He made the mistake of acting without regard for himself in order to take care of the others.'

Jasta 28 had engaged seven FE 2d fighters of No 20 Sqn, and Schäfer had attacked one and mortally wounded its pilot, Lt W W Sawden. Another of the 'Fees', flown by Lt H L Satchell with observer 2Lt Lewis, went to the aid of their crippled comrade and zeroed in on Schäfer. Many years later Satchell recalled, 'We were about 50 yards from him, and I can still picture his black helmet in the red aeroplane.' The disintegrating D III came down near Zandvoorde. Some historians have wondered if Schäfer was more a victim of the Albatros' deadly structural flaws than of the RFC crew's fire.

Jasta 28's new commander, Hptm Otto Hartmann, arrived on 7 June – a truly eventful day on the Flanders front. The Battle of Messines opened quite literally with a bang at 0310 hrs, when 400 tons of ammonal in 19 mines under the German trenches exploded. Even before the



ground-shaking roar of this explosion died away, a massive artillery bombardment began and the Tommies went over the top. As RFC contact patrols and their fighter escorts covered the infantry advance, *Jasta 28* contested control of the air.

Müller was on a hot streak, getting his first 'double' on the 7th, followed by a Sopwith Triplane on the 8th. Despite these successes, his resentment was still evident in a letter he wrote to his father on the 9th;

'This is to inform you that I shot down a triplane yesterday. Again, it fell in a thousand pieces. The day before, at 0815 hrs, and at noon, I shot down a SPAD on each occasion, so that I have brought down 17 aircraft incontestably. Let that be put in the newspaper sometime. I am not going to do it. I don't know why it doesn't appear in the Army Communiqué. I think they are chagrined that an *offizier-stellvertreter* can shoot down 17 Englishmen. Or they are waiting until I become an officer.'

Only two days later Müller finally received some recognition;

'Yesterday, I was mentioned in the Army Communiqués for my 14 victories, the others will be mentioned later.'

On 20 June the combative Bavarian was credited with his 18th victory, and eight days later he was awarded Württemberg's Golden Military Merit Medal. In the following two weeks poor weather gave Müller and his comrades some rest, but he then received that sad news that his younger brother Josef had been killed in a training accident at FEA 1b. Müller was granted compassionate leave to attend his funeral.

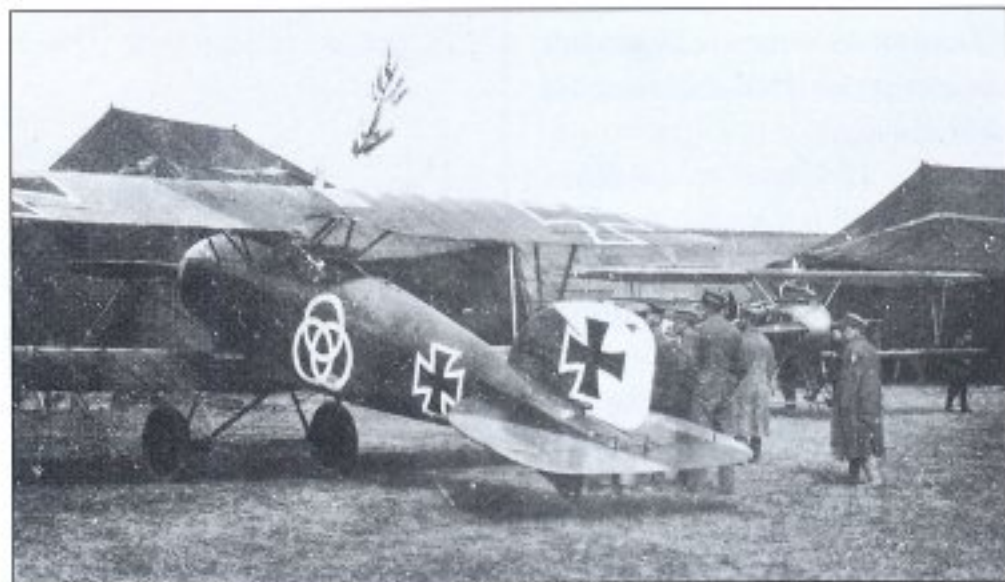
In contrast to the hot combat in Flanders, things at the Leffincourt base of *Jasta 9* in the 3. *Armee* had been relatively quiet. In fact, the *Staffel* failed to down a single French aircraft in June. Therefore, Heinrich Kroll was very happy to be named commander of *Jasta 24* on 1 July, as it had just been moved to Heule in the active 4. *Armee* front. On the 2nd he wrote;

'Since yesterday, I am the leader of *Jasta 24*, and have the additional luck to be sent to Flanders. There is a wonderful feeling (*esprit de corps*) in the *Staffel* among all officers, NCOs and men. It is common now for successful pilots to be promoted to lead a *Staffel*. The number of unit victories scored to date approximates 12 or 14, and here I am, only 24 years old, in command! All pilots, officers and NCOs live in the same Mess. The place is so small that we must share rooms, but we all work, eat, sleep and play together – this is a good thing for morale. This comradeship extends to air fighting as well.

'The French and the English fight completely differently. The English always attack and fight to the end. Some Englishmen do this without any tactics or plan. The number of the enemy machines is always more than our own, and the SPAD and the Sopwith are very good aircraft. We have greater morale and enthusiasm than the enemy, and this ensures that we win.'

One of Kroll's best pilots in *Jasta 24* was Vfw (later Offz Stv) Friedrich Altemeier. Born in Niederbecken,

Vfw Friedrich Altemeier's Albatros D III is seen at left on the *Jasta 24* airfield. Altemeier had worked for Krupp before the war, and he used the firm's industrial logo of three intertwined rings as his personal symbol. The fuselage appears quite dark, but this is likely due to the effect of the warm yellow varnished plywood on orthochromatic film (HAC/UTD)



near Hannover, on 14 June 1886, Altemeier had worked for the Krupp works before the war. He was 28 years old when called up on 2 August 1914, and was wounded as a member of a machine gun company in January 1915. As was often the case, an injury led to his transfer to the air service, and he began his training at the FEA in Posen in August. In July 1916 Altemeier was posted to FFA 67 as a two-seater pilot, but after a brief course at the single-seater school in Köln, he wound up with a posting to *Jasta* 24 on 1 December 1916.



Altemeier's D III reaches for altitude on take-off. This aircraft was fitted with small lower wing braces attached to the bottom of the vee-struts to prevent the wing from twisting (HAC/UTD)

Having been promoted to *vizefeldwebel* on 13 February 1917, Altemeier accounted for his *Staffel's* second victory on 3 March when he brought down the Nieuport of Sous-Lt Auguste Ledeuil of N103, who was taken PoW. After the move to Heule, Altemeier was the first to score against the new British foes when he downed one of the vaunted Sopwith Triplanes from '1 Naval' on 7 July, mortally wounding Flt Sub-Lt D W Ramsey. Five days later, he brought his tally to three with a SPAD destroyed over Zillebeke Lake. Altemeier would score consistently, and survive three wounds, to end the war with 20 or 21 victories.

Not far from the Heule airfield of *Jasta* 24, a significant new fighter formation had recently completed its initial set-up in the vicinity of Marcke, southwest of Courtrai. This was *Jagdgeschwader* I, a permanent grouping of *Jagdstaffeln* 4, 6, 10 and 11 which would gain immortal celebrity as 'Richthofen's Circus'. Its role was clearly delineated in orders stating that the '*Geschwader* is a closed unit. Its task is the achievement of air superiority in important operational areas.'

It was well that JG I had been stationed on the Flanders front, for the RFC was assembling in massive strength for the Third Battle of Ypres. The British air offensive was slated to begin on 8 July, but bad weather delayed it until the 11th. This was followed on the 12th by what was generally considered to have been 'the heaviest air fighting of the war to date'. The aerial combat continued throughout the day, and occupied every part of the British front. The *Jasta* pilots were credited with 23 aircraft downed (most of them RFC machines) for the loss of one pilot killed, two more wounded and one injured in a crash.

One of the *Jagdstaffel* pilots in action on the 12th was Lt n d R Ernst Hess of *Jasta* 28, who stepped up to fill the void left by the death of Schäfer and the absence of Max Müller. Hess had been born in Wiesbaden on 8 January 1893, and as a mechanically-minded youth, he had learned to fly in 1913. In November 1914 he had been posted to FFA 9 as an *unteroffizier* pilot. By 24 June 1915 Hess had advanced to the rank of *leutnant der reserve*, but hungered for a more aggressive role in the air. In November 1915 he managed to obtain a posting to FFA 62 and, even better, was attached to *KEK* Douai, where he flew alongside his idols Immelmann and Boelcke.

These were the heady days of the 'Fokker Scourge', and Hess scored his first two victories as an Eindecker pilot. He later flew in *Fokkerstaffel* Sivry, and was sent to the newly formed *Jasta* 10 in November 1916. His experience led to a stretch as an instructor, but Hess managed to once again obtain a posting to a combat unit in a hot sector, and arrived at the Wasquehal aerodrome of *Jasta* 28 on 12 June 1917.

Exactly one month later, Hess, flying his Albatros D III 2041/16, found an RE 8 over Wytschaete and attacked it at 1000 hrs. The two-seater was hit with a crippling burst of fire and dived steeply into the thick ground fog. Modern research has shown this was certainly RE 8 A4621 of No 53 Sqn, which was shot down with its pilot Sgt R Kay wounded and observer Lt B Binkley killed. However, due to a lack of the mandatory ground-based witnesses, Hess failed to receive confirmation for his claim – a frustration that he would suffer many more times.

However, on the succeeding day – 13 July – Hess had better luck when his *Kette* (a flight of three to six aircraft) sighted a formation of DH 4 bombers from No 55 Sqn crossing the lines. The Albatros pilots climbed to 4300 metres and placed themselves in a good position to intercept the de Havillands on their return. Hess dived on the rearmost bomber on the left of the formation, exchanged fire with the observer and put him out of action. After another 100 rounds, the big two-seater went into a vertical dive, and Hess watched as first the wings and then the observer fell away from the hurtling fuselage. DH 4 A7421 hit the ground near Audenarde and burst into flames at 1630 hrs. The body of pilot 2Lt A Matheson was found in the charred wreckage, while the body of observer 2Lt F Oliver lay several hundred metres away. With such grim evidence, Hess's third victory was unquestionably confirmed.

For the next week Hess and other pilots of *Jasta* 28 had numerous combats but no successes.

———— JASTA 17 COMES TO FLANDERS ————

Another *Staffel* in the 4. *Armee* was Julius Buckler's *Jasta* 17, which had transferred to Ghisteltes on 24 June. In his book *Malaula*, Buckler wrote;

'A more beautiful aerodrome than the one we found here could not be imagined, with roomy tents and even a hangar. The Ostende seaside resort lay right next door. Already, the increased cannon fire revealed to us that there would be plenty for us to do in this sector.'

In the late afternoon of 14 July, Buckler achieved a memorable victory, and would recount the story of the day's fight many times in later years. He recalled it was a stormy, oppressive day, with seemingly little chance of aerial activity;

'From the aerodrome came the report – Enemy flier over Bruges (Brugge)! Because everyone was sleeping and no order followed, I went alone to the airfield, mounted my *Mops* with shirt, trousers, scarf and goggles on and flew towards the old Flanders town.'

He climbed through the clouds and sighted an RFC aircraft flying 200 metres above – he enticed it to dive down at him. Buckler's opponent was Canadian Lt C M De Rochie of No 27 Sqn, flying Martinsyde G 102 A6266. He had departed his base at 1500 hrs to bomb Zarren. Among his squadronmates, De Rochie had a reputation as a courageous pilot, and Buckler would indeed recall his adversary as a skilled and tenacious foe.

Nonetheless, Buckler turned the tables on him and set his machine aflame with a few well-placed shots. He was then startled to see his opponent pull himself out of the blazing Martinsyde and fall headlong into the sea of clouds below.

The fight took place almost over the *Jasta* 17 airfield, and Buckler's *Staffel* mates had been horrified to see a body followed by flaming wreckage fall out of the cloud layer, as they could not know if it was Buckler or his opponent. The charred engine of the Martinsyde – all that remained of the aircraft – was found four kilometres from the aerodrome, while De Rochie's body was pulled from the nearby Yser Canal.

Fierce fighting continued all along the Flanders front, weather permitting. *Jasta* 12 commander Oblt von Tutschek was running up a string of successes. On 13 July he wrote;

'Now the *Pour le Mérite* is due. Yesterday evening at about 1800 hrs, northwest of Lens, I sent a balloon burning to the ground, and this morning No 18 – an English Nieuport single-seater – which crashed and was totally wrecked three kilometres north of Lens.'

This 'Nieuport' seems to actually have been a No 27 Sqn Martinsyde. On the 15th, von Tutschek kept his streak going by capturing a Nieuport 23 from No 60 Sqn. Its pilot, Lt G Parkes, was prevented from setting his aircraft on fire when von Tutschek's black Albatros came down and sprayed a few bullets his way. On the 17th, Julius Buckler destroyed a Sopwith Pup from No 54 Sqn for his 11th confirmed claim. The German ace was lightly wounded that same day, but remained with *Jasta* 17.

At *Jasta* 28, in the meantime, Max Müller had returned to Wasquehal, and had written on the 24th; 'I am eating with the officers now because the gentlemen have told me that I will become an officer in the next few days. I have been accepted very well.' Müller's commission would not come through until 25 August, but he had already been granted officer's privileges in anticipation.

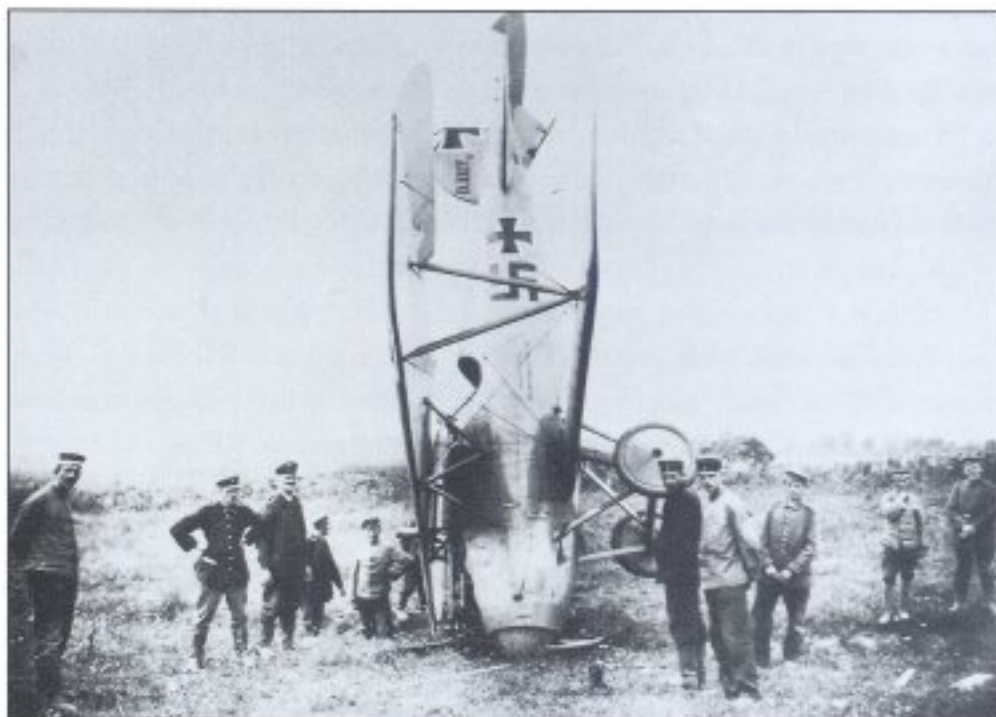
One of the officers who made Müller feel welcome was probably Ltn d R Ernst Hess, who tallied his fourth victory on 27 July. The succeeding day, still flying D III 2041/16, Hess knocked down a Sopwith 1½ Strutter from No 45 Sqn at about 1100 hrs for his crucial fifth success.

Not to be outdone, seven hours later Müller shot up another Strutter from the same squadron for his 19th confirmed opponent, although RFC records indicate that the crew returned safely.

It seems things were not quite as active on some sectors of the French front. Ltn d R Johann Janzen (the *Jasta* 23 pilot we met at the end of Chapter One) reported of his *Staffel*;

'In April (1917) we moved to the 7. *Armee* area and occupied the aerodrome at Arlon, near Marle. The move was not a welcome one since we were now opposed solely by French formations, and they

Ltn d R Johann Janzen put his *Jasta* 23 D V 1117/17 on its nose during a bad landing in the summer of 1917. The black swastika unit marking was still in use at this time, but this would end with the unit's transformation into a Bavarian *Jasta* and the arrival of Ltn d R Kissenberth as the new commander on 4 August (HAC/UTD)



were well known for their carefulness. Although we met fleetingly in the air, I had bad luck, and never really got my sights onto a French machine. It was the same story when we moved to the 5. *Armee* front (Jametz airfield, on 20 July 1917), and although we were given a hectic time by the enemy anti-aircraft fire, we did not have much success at air fighting.'

On 4 August Janzen's *Staffelführer*, Hptm Backhaus, was given command of *Flieger Abteilung (A) 259*, as *Jasta 23* had been re-designated a Bavarian unit and would be commanded by Lt n d R Otto Kissenberth. With these changes, Janzen felt ready for a move of his own, and he managed to obtain a coveted posting to *Jasta 6* of the Richthofen *Geschwader*. His war then heated up considerably, Janzen scoring 12 more victories – most of them in Fokker Dr Is and D VIs – before being made a PoW on 9 June 1918.

Other successful *Jagdflieger* were also arriving in Flanders during this period. When the *Jasta 15* commander Heinrich Gontermann had returned from his leave on 19 June, he found his acting *Staffelführer* Ernst Udet shaken by the losses the unit had suffered under his leadership. Udet asked to be permitted to transfer to *Jasta 37*. 'There are old comrades there from Habsheim', said Udet in a low voice. 'The last from the old *KEK*. Of course, I will help break in the replacements before I leave.'

A disappointed Gontermann reluctantly acceded to Udet's request, although his transfer did not take place until 26 July. *Jasta 37* was based near *Jasta 28*, and the two units formed *Jagdgruppe Lille*. Udet received a warm welcome from his old friend Oblt Kurt Grasshoff, who was a *Staffelführer* with the unit, and he soon befriended promising pilot Oblt Hans Waldhausen. The latter would score six quick kills before being shot down and taken prisoner on 27 September.

Jasta 37 had merely two victories on its scoreboard at this time, and its unblooded airmen needed guidance. Waldhausen wrote:

'I was involved with Udet in the daily training of our fighter pilots. There were times when we couldn't bring it to a close, so involved were we with each other. From it I gained a knowledge of the maximum potential of my machine in respect of manoeuvrability, tight turning, spinning and nose-diving. It was particularly instructive when I played "tag" in the air with Udet, especially when the disposition of the clouds made it possible to disappear. For a long time I'd imagined that I could do without precision aiming during an air battle if I was as close as possible to an enemy. From Udet I learnt that it was always a great mistake to shoot without first aligning sights and beads precisely, however close the enemy. He also warned me never to attack two-seaters from above.'

THE THIRD BATTLE OF YPRES

After several delays, the Third Battle of Ypres (or the First Battle of Passchendaele) finally began on 31 July 1917. The German 4. *Armee* bore the brunt of this assault, and as such it now included the vast majority of active *Jagdstaffeln* – no fewer than 18, including the four *Jasta* of the elite JG I. On the 31st, low clouds and mist all day hampered aerial operations by both sides, and the *Jasta* pilots claimed only seven aircraft – all of them in the 4. *Armee*.

Another ace with a growing reputation arrived in Flanders at this time. With his score standing at five, Lt n d R Josef Jacobs of *Jasta 22* (in the



On 27 July 1917, Ernst Udet transferred to *Jasta 37* in Flanders. Commanded by Udet's friend Oblt Kurt Grasshoff, the *Staffel* had an undistinguished record, but Udet's drive, example and tutelage of his fellow pilots would soon change that. As the caption for this Sanke postcard noted, Udet took over the *Jasta* on 7 November 1917 at the age of 21

One of the *Jasta 37* pilots who benefited from the training supplied by Udet and Hans Waldhausen was Vfw Ernst Hamster (also noted as Hamscher), seen with his D III. He downed two RE 8s on 30 September 1917, followed by a Camel on 23 November. The unit heraldry of the *Jasta* included black and white stripes on the wheel covers and tailplane, as well as a black spinner – the pilot's personal marking was a white fuselage band (HAC/UTD)





This business end of Hamster's *Jasta 37 D III* is nicely displayed in this view straight out of a Hollywood film. Note the central radiator and the diagonal black/white stripes on the tailplane, which were the most conspicuous of the unit's markings (*HAC/UTD*)

Obfg Kurt Schönfelder would become a leading ace of *Jasta 7*, and the close comrade of *Staffelführer* Josef Jacobs. Schönfelder's later Fokker D VII is known to have borne a black fuselage with a 'golden' star insignia, and it is obvious his Albatros D V displayed the same markings (*photo courtesy A Imrie*)



7. *Armee*) recorded two events of great significance in his diary entry for 2 August;

'Lt n (Alfred) Lenz came and told me that I had been named CO of *Jagdstaffel 7* that is in the 4. *Armee*. The day thereafter I received the *Orden von Hohenzollern mit Schweren*. On the 3rd I travelled with Lt n d R (Georg) Meyer and Lt n (Otto) Kunst, whom I was allowed to take with me to Flanders. *Jasta 7* is based at Wynendaele. The *Kasino* is a beautiful chateau with a wonderful park. As pilots there are six officers and four NCOs there. On the 14th Lt n Meyer and Uffz

(Hans) Horst both shot down a kite balloon (on 16 August) and Obfg Schönfelder brought down a SPAD of Guynemer's "Stork Squadron". The pilot (Sous-Lt Henri Rabatel) landed on a German airfield with a wound in his upper leg.'

Although a lung infection had initially kept Jacobs from flying, he was back in the air by 16 August, flying what he called a 'strengthened' Albatros D V (a reference to wing reinforcement). Jacobs may have been flying with Schönfelder when the naval pilot captured the SPAD VII from the 'les Cigognes' *Escadrille*. Obfg Kurt Schönfelder was born on 30 July 1894 at Totschen. He was a pre-war aviator, having earned his licence No 634 on 27 December 1913.

A naval airman attached to an Army *Staffel*, Schönfelder had served in *Jasta 7* since December 1916. He had struggled through a frustrating start to his career as a *Jagdflieger*. On 12 May 1917, he had forced down a BE 2 to land at Woeuvres, but was only credited with a '*zur Landung gezwungen*' (forced to land) aircraft, which did not equal a full victory credit. Schönfelder claimed a Sopwith on both 21 and 24 May, but failed to receive confirmation for either. He finally broke into the scoring column on 20 July when he destroyed a No 56 Sqn SE 5, killing its pilot,

Capt E D Messervy. Schönfelder would emerge as Josef Jacobs' closest friend and trusted wingman in *Jasta 7*. Jacobs affectionately called him '*mein Wassermann*' or literally 'my water bearer'.

On 21 August, Jacobs was landing his black D V when he collided with another D V flown by Lt n Otto Kunst. Both of the *Jasta 7* aircraft were destroyed, and Jacobs apparently had to revert to flying a D III.

Not all the action was on the 4. *Armee* front. Just to the south in the

6. *Armee*, Lt Joachim von Bertrab took off from the *Jasta* 30 aerodrome at Phalempin on 12 August, flying D V 2191/17. He had only managed to add one more victory since April, but hoped to flame the British balloon at Souchez for his sixth. However, he was intercepted by a Nieuport flown by Lt Edward 'Mick' Mannock of No 40 Sqn (who also had five victories by this date, but who would add many more). Mannock later wrote;

'Had a splendid fight with a single-seater Albatros Scout last week on our side of the lines and got him down. This proved to be Lt von Bartrap (sic), Iron Cross, and had been flying for 18 months. He came over for one of our balloons, near Neuville-St Vaast, and I cut him off going back. He didn't get the balloon either. The scrap took place at 2000 ft up, well within view of the whole front. And the cheers! It took me five minutes to get him down, and I had to shoot him before he would land. I was very pleased that I did not kill him – right arm broken by a bullet, left arm and left leg deep flesh wounds. His machine, a beauty, just issued (1 June 1917) with a 220 hp (sic) Mercedes engine, all black with crosses picked out in white lines, turned over on landing and was damaged.'

Further southeast in the 5. *Armee* sector there were still opportunities for pilots to earn their first *Luftsieg*. Lt d R Theodor Rumpel was flying with Bavarian *Jasta* 16 at this time, but had previously seen service in FA (A) 280 and *Jasta* 26. At *Jasta* 16b, he honed his skills as a member of a three-man *Kette* which included two formidable air fighters – Lt d Rs Otto Kissenberth and Ludwig Hanstein. Years later, Rumpel recalled;

'*Jasta* 16 was assigned to 5. *Armee*, opposite Verdun, where there was much activity. Heavy fighting started around *Mort Homme* that was accompanied by numerous aircraft in the air from both sides, including many French captive balloons. Kissenberth already had a balloon (on 19 June, for his fifth victory), so I tried my luck on 10 August.

'It was midday, and the French were usually known to be dining. I flew alone from *Mort Homme* down to Verdun (text continues on page 61),



Kurt Schönfelder achieved 13 victories before his death on 26 June 1918. Josef Jacobs wrote, 'He was one of the best pilots, being well known along the whole Western Front. He had been mentioned often by the *Koff* with honour, and had brought down nine enemy aeroplanes and balloons in the last days' (photo courtesy A Imrie)

On 21 August 1917, Josef Jacobs was gliding in to a forced landing with a damaged engine, unaware that Lt Otto Kunst was also landing. The two *Jasta* 7 Albatros D Vs collided. 'I saw a shadow on my right wing', wrote Jacobs. 'There was a cracking and tumbling through the air and a crash on the ground. For a moment, I was somewhat stunned. As my aircraft had lost its landing gear, I could step out of the fuselage at ground level. Not far from me, I saw Kunst still lying in what remained of his aeroplane. He had his twin guns in front of him and the seat on which he was sitting. The remainder of the aircraft had completely disintegrated.' Jacobs' D V is at right, with small additional crosses on the upper wing (HAC/UTD)



COLOUR PLATES



1
Albatros D II (serial unknown)
of Oblt Kurt Student, *Jasta 9*,
Leffincourt, February 1917



2
Albatros D II (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Wilhelm Leusch, *Jasta 19*,
Les Mesnil, April 1917



3
Albatros D II (serial unknown)
of Ltn Emil Meinecke, Ottoman
Fliegerabteilung 6, Chanak-Kale,
Summer 1917



4
Albatros D III 1958/16 of Oblt Paul von Osterroht, *Jasta 12*, Epinoy, March 1917



5
Albatros D III (serial unknown) of Offz Stv Friedrich Altemeier, *Jasta 24*, Annelles, Summer 1917



6
Albatros D III 2041/16 of Ltn d R Ernst Hess, *Jasta 28w*, Wasquehal, August 1917



7
Albatros D III 643/17 of Oblt Robert Greim, *Jasta 34b*, Mars la Tour, Summer 1917



8
Albatros D III 2092/16 of Ltn d R Richard Wenzl, *Jasta 31*, Mars-sous-Bourcq, June 1917



9
Albatros D III (serial unknown) of Oblt Eduard Dostler, *Jasta 34*, Mars la Tour, circa April 1917



10
Albatros D III (serial unknown) of Ltn Joachim von Bertrab, *Jasta 30*, Phalempin, Summer 1917



11
Albatros D III 760/17 of Ltn d R Hans Oblerländer, *Jasta 30*, Phalempin, Summer 1917



12
Albatros D III 2171/16 of Ltn d R Josef Veltjens, *Jasta 14*, Marchais, March 1917



13
Albatros D III 2274/16 of Oblt Adolf Ritter von Tutschek, *Jasta 12*, Epinoy, May 1917



14
Albatros D V 1117/17 of Ltn d R Johann Janzen, *Jasta 23*, Erlon by Marle, Summer 1917



15
Albatros D V 1154/17 of Offz Stv Max Müller, *Jasta 28*, Wasquehal, August 1917



16
Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Theodor Rumpel, *Jasta 23b*, Jametz, September 1917



17
Albatros D V 4594/17 of Ltn d R Paul Strähle, *Jasta 18*, Houplin,
circa November 1917



18
Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Arthur Rahn, *Jasta 18*, Avelin,
circa January 1918



19
Albatros D V 4476/17 of Ltn d R Ernst Udet, *Jasta 37*, Phalempin,
September 1917



20
Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Ernst Udet, *Jasta 37*, Wynghe, *Wynghene*,
Autumn 1917



21

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltnd R Theodor Rumpel, *Jasta 23b*, Aniche, February/March 1918



22

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltnd Heinrich Seywald, *Jasta 23b*, Aniche, February 1918



23

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltnd R Viktor Schobinger, *Jasta 12*, Roucourt, August 1917



24

Albatros D III (OAW) 5127/17 of Ltnd R Hermann Habich, *Jasta 49*, Bruille, March 1918



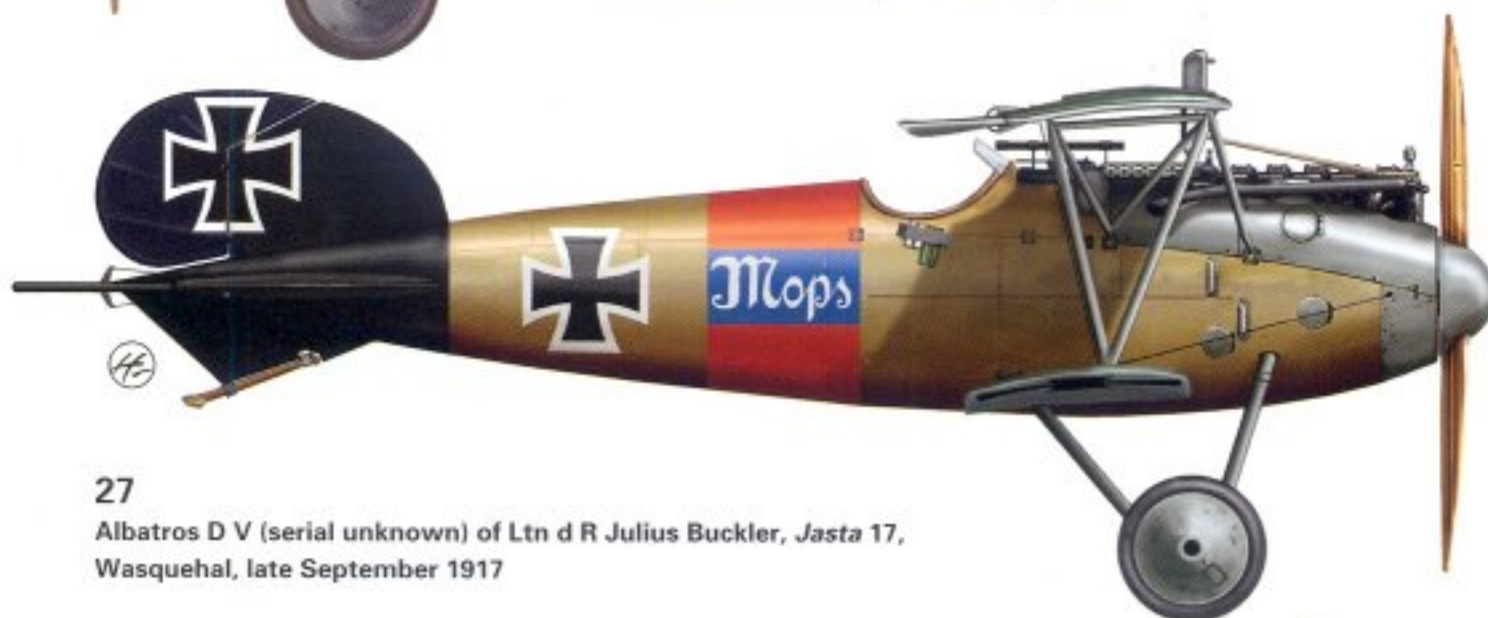
25

Albatros D Va of Ltn d R Walter Böning, *Jasta 76b*, Habsheim, circa February 1918



26

Albatros D III (OAW) 2380/17 of Ltn d R Heinrich Arntzen, *Jasta 50*, Marle-Autremencourt, circa February 1918



27

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Julius Buckler, *Jasta 17*, Wasquehal, late September 1917



28

Albatros D V 4408/17 of Vfw Georg Strasser, *Jasta 17*, Rethéuil Ferme, circa December 1917



29

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Rudolf Windisch, *Jasta 32b*, Landreville, September 1917



30

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Obfg Kurt Schönfelder, *Jasta 7*, Aertrycke, early 1918



31

Albatros D Va 5426/17(?) of Ltn zur See Gotthard Sachsenberg, MFJ I, Aertrycke, late Summer/Autumn 1917



32

Albatros D V 4594/17 of Ltn d R Paul Strähle, *Jasta 57*, Halluin, May 1918

Profile 5



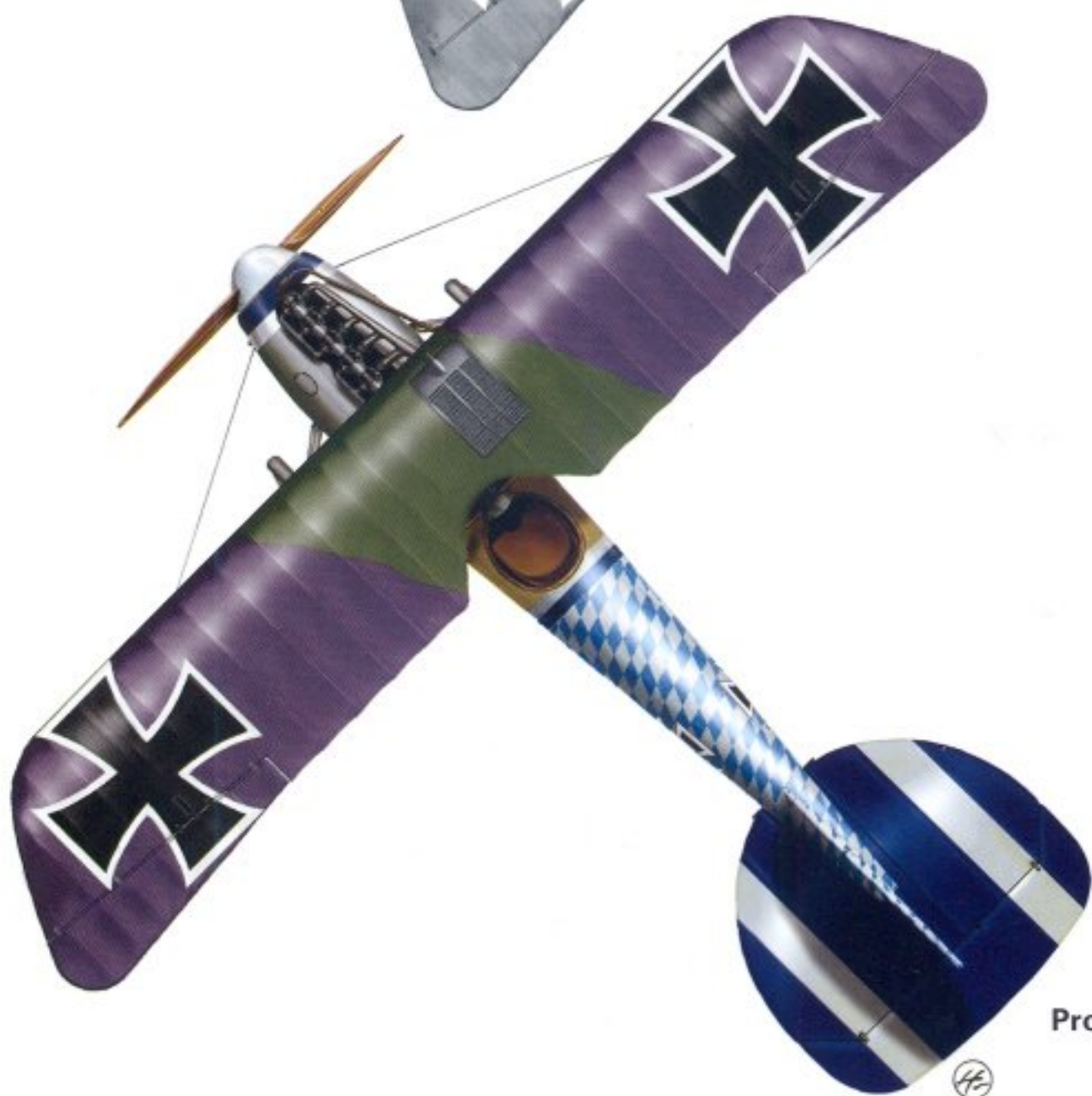
Profile 15

Profile 10



Profile 29

Profile 20



Profile 25

where, in the suburb of Belleville, an important balloon was fixed. Clouds helped me to approach undiscovered, and after three bursts from my guns the balloon was on fire. However, the way back was not as easy as the approach! At first a Nieuport attacked me, but after I fired a few rounds I was rid of him, only to be attacked by a Parasol, which was easier to shake off. When I finally reached the frontlines, a SPAD was after me, but I managed to elude him and return safely – my first victory!

Later that day Rumpel's zebra-striped Albatros D V was hit by French flak, cutting his fuel lines. He tried to glide back to his base at Spincourt, but instead made a forced landing in a pond near his field. The D V flipped over and Rumpel almost drowned, for his head was under water and he had to struggle to undo his seat belt and shoulder straps.

Rumpel also attempted to replicate his balloon-busting success the following month;

'On 5 September, Hanstein and I repeated an air balloon raid at Belleville similar to the one on 10 August. Hanstein flew in front, with me behind him to protect him when being attacked. And so it occurred, Hanstein was attacked by a Parasol fighter right before, or almost the moment, he reached the balloon. The Parasol was directly in front of my aeroplane, and it was an easy game to shoot it down in flames.'

Rumpel had burned a Morane Saulnier P of *Escadrille* F215 for his second victory.

Back on the Flanders front, meanwhile, the pace of combat had continued to increase, particularly for Max Müller and Ernst Hess of *Jasta* 28. On 17 August, Müller wrote to his worried father;

'This morning at 0720 hrs, I shot down a very new type (an SE 5) as number 22. Numbers 19, 20, 21 and 22 are all lying behind our lines. Just for your sake, none is over the English lines anymore. But you know yourself how careful I am. I am greatly celebrated in the *Staffel* – you should see it sometime.'

On 9 August Hess destroyed an unidentified British aircraft over Neuve Eglise at 0750 hrs, then engaged the enemy once again about three hours later;

'During a fighter patrol in the area around Ypres, Lt n Bolle of my *Kette* was attacked at 2500 metres by a SPAD. I dropped in behind him unobserved and, flying directly behind him, with ten shots forced him into a glide. Despite having jams in both guns, I followed him until down to an altitude of about 400 metres, when he landed at Zonnebeke.'

This SPAD became Hess's seventh victory.

Max Müller had proven his courage and dedication, repeatedly venturing over the British lines to bring his score to 26 confirmed victories on 21 August. On that day Müller contributed a double to an



In the late summer of 1917, Theodor Rumpel was forced to glide back from a patrol east of Verdun with a cut fuel line. He landed in a small, shallow pond at the edge of the *Jasta* 16 airfield and his D V went over on its back. 'I was still held in the aircraft by my seat belts in an upside down position, and almost drowned because my head was under the water', he later wrote. Luckily, mechanics arrived and lifted the tail up, permitting Rumpel to escape with a bellyful of water

amazing bag of eight British aircraft credited to *Jasta* 28. On the 26th the Bavarian received an honour unparalleled in German fighter aviation. He was commissioned *leutnant* in the Active, or Regular, Army – normally an *offizier stellvertreter* would be promoted to *leutnant der reserve*. Now as a *leutnant* with 26 victories, Müller's nomination for the *Pour le Mérite* was speedily processed and approved on 3 September.

UDET

Another ace of small stature had also been building up his score in August. Ernst Udet had re-entered the victory column on 14 August with a DH 4 from No 25 Sqn for his seventh success. The next day he shot down a courageously flown Sopwith 1½ Strutter from No 43 Sqn that had dared to strafe the *Jasta* 37 airfield. On the 21st Udet stalked six speedy DH 4 bombers from No 57 Sqn, finally catching up with the formation and shooting one down at Ascq for his ninth victory. At that time *Jasta* 37 was part of *Jagdgruppe* 'Bethge' (along with *Jasta* 12 and 30) in the 6. *Armee*.

Udet's tenth success came on 17 September, during his first encounter with the DH 5 – a fighter with unique backward-staggered wings. The previous night *Jasta* 37 had spent a wet evening entertaining guests, so when Udet's orderly awoke him at 0500 hrs, it was a bit of a struggle. But it was good flying weather, so Udet reluctantly got out of bed and stuck his aching head in the water basin. Then he prepared to take off in D V 4476/17, as he wrote in *Kreuz wider Kokarde* (translated by Adam Wait):

'I had quite a headache, and felt an overall weariness in my limbs. A wonderful cure for that is a nice morning flight, during which the wind can whistle through one's head and hair. So I quickly took off before breakfast.

'I flew mechanically along the front in a southerly direction. When I turned northwards once more, I noticed almost directly above me German flak fire. Immediately thereafter I saw three English aircraft. I climbed to their height and watched them for a while. At first I thought they were Sopwiths flying on their backs, since the upper wing, which as a rule is staggered forward in all English aircraft, in this case was staggered rearwards. "So it must be a new type", I told myself.

'The Englishmen tried every possible manoeuvre with their new crates. They spun down, executed loops, did barrel rolls and numerous other such things. I was about 100 metres above them. When the first one came within firing range, he hoisted himself upwards and began to fire. That

really disturbed me a bit. I put my machine on its nose and likewise opened fire.

'At that point all three of them swung westwards and then approached me once more. This time we were at the same altitude. The first one came at me from the front and opened fire again. However, since he saw that I in no way intended to give way to him, he became frightened at the last moment and went into a turn about

Ltn d R Ernst Udet of *Jasta* 37 flew this Albatros D V 4476/17 to obtain his tenth victory on 17 September 1917. His usual LO emblem was painted on the natural-varnished fuselage in black and white (HAC/UTD)





30 metres in front of me. I had been waiting for this turn, and now for my part drew a good bead on him. After a few well-aimed rounds, his new little machine broke apart in the air, while his two comrades had apparently lost their desire for combat.'

Udet's unfortunate opponent was 2Lt Robert E Taylor, a 27-year-old Canadian from No 41 Sqn who was killed by a bullet through the heart. The wreckage of his DH 5 (A9409) fell south of Izel. As Udet flew down to circle the wreckage, he noticed the other two DH 5s preparing to attack him. However, Albatros fighters from *Jasta 30* intercepted them, and Uffz Emil Liebert subtracted a second DH 5 from No 41 Sqn's roster. Udet later visited the site and took photographs of the shattered machine. He also took one of Taylor's identity discs, leaving the other on the body – which he covered with the cockade cut from the wing of the aircraft.

In 1931 Udet was put in contact with Taylor's family, and he wrote to them supplying details of the combat, and offering to send them the personal items he had souvenired. 'I shall be glad to return these articles to his relatives, for whom the possession of these must be of far greater value than to me', he noted in his letter.

On 28 September, Udet pulled off his first double in a manner reflecting his increasing skill and confidence. As he told it;

'So one evening, five English Camels were flying under and past me, heading toward our front. I was located about four to five kilometres behind the English frontlines, and for almost 20 minutes had been observing an *Artilleriehäschen* ("artillery rabbit" – slang for an artillery spotter), which was flying far below me, but I had never found the right moment to attack. Because of this, the five brothers were more than welcome. It appeared to me that they had not seen me, because they were cheerfully flying straight ahead towards the west. I now flew up till just around 200 metres behind them, as if I belonged to them – still they had not noticed me.

'The five were flying in wedge formation. Because I had come from above, I had greater speed, and I flew into the wedge, open from

In late summer/early autumn 1917, Udet flew this silver Albatros D V. It is believed that there was a small batch of D Vs finished in matte silver overall, much like Pfalz aircraft. The spinner and metal engine cowlings were apparently black, and the aircraft featured the usual black/white *Jasta 37* stripes on the tailplane and wheel covers. Udet and his mechanic obscure the LO insignia on the fuselage. A prominent windscreen and tubular gunsight were fitted (A Imrie via HAC/UTD)

Udet flies his silver D V over Flanders in the autumn of 1917, just revealing the LO emblem on the fuselage. The trailing black and white streamers were a very common leader's identification (HAC/UTD)



behind. When I had come so near that both of the aircraft in the rear were flying along with me in a line – only 30 or 40 metres to the left and right of me – I fired at the aircraft located to the left and near the leader. It immediately burst into flames and crashed. In a second, I locked the leader into my sights and shot up his engine and gas tank with a few bullets. He put his aircraft on its nose and went down vertically. He made a successful landing. The three other Tommies had received such a shock that they spun down in all directions.'

This day, No 43 Sqn lost 2Lt R P Hood killed in Camel B6209, while Capt T S Wynn was forced to land in B2366 near Wingles with his engine shot up, which seems to match Udet's claims. When Udet landed back at *Jasta 37*, his commander, Oblt Grasshoff, told him that someday he would inherit the *Staffel* when Grasshoff left, which is exactly what happened on 7 November.

Accomplished pilots like Udet, Müller and von Tutschek were still able to get the most out of their D IIIs and D Vs, maximising the aeroplanes' strengths and minimising their faults by careful tactics and great flying skill. It was just as well that they could, since there were virtually no alternatives to the Albatros for a *Jagdflieger* in the late summer of 1917.

On 31 August, 424 D V fighters were recorded in the *Frontbestand*, along with 385 D III machines. With the 56 D Is and D IIs still in use, Albatros fighters made up 84 percent of the 1030 D-types recorded at the front. Production of both the D III and D V was approaching the maximum capacity of the Albatros factories. Although many German pilots now realised these aircraft were inferior to the best Allied types, there were no others available. As early as 18 July, Manfred von Richthofen had written the following pointed note to his friend Oblt Fritz von Falkenhayn, the *Kogenluft* staff's technical officer;

'Our aircraft are laughingly inferior to the English. Their Triplane and 200 hp SPAD, as well as the Sopwith single-seater (Camel), play with our D V. Besides better quality, they also have superiority in numbers. All of our good fighter pilots are lost in this manner. The D V is so obsolete and so ridiculously inferior to the English that one can't begin to do anything with this aircraft. But the people at home have not bought anything new for almost a year, except for this lousy Albatros, and have remained stuck with the D III. As long as Albatros has no energetic competition, we are left in the lurch with the D III/V.'

Von Richthofen pinned his hopes on the Fokker Dr I triplane. Due to its own disastrous wing failures, however, the Dr I would not reach the front in appreciable quantities until January 1918. Examples of the streamlined Pfalz D III were beginning to arrive by the end of August, but this new type did not live up to the promise of its racy looks. Albatros would remain the primary supplier of German fighter aircraft, and August saw the first orders for the new improved D Va.

Udet appears at left with 1st Lt R Heinrich Schleth, believed to have flown with *Jasta 37* in late 1917. The silver D V may well be Udet's aircraft before his LO insignia was applied. Note the gunsight (HAC/UTD)



Almost identical in appearance to the D V, the D Va was reinforced throughout its airframe with stronger spars, heavier ribs and additional fuselage members. The aileron cables were once again routed through the lower wing (like the D III), and wing tip support cables were added. These modifications increased the weight of the D Va, which was greater than that of the D III and the early D V. When powered by the 160 hp Mercedes, the D Va had a poorer performance than its predecessors.

Luckily, experiments on high-compression or high-altitude engines were paying off. By increasing the compression ratio and adjusting the carburettor, the power output of a standard Mercedes could be maintained at higher altitudes. Deliveries of the Mercedes D IIIa, rated at approximately 180 hp, began in March 1918. Also, 1500 high-compression pistons were supplied monthly for use as replacements in the Mercedes D IIIs already in use. In August 262 D Vas were ordered, followed by 250 more in September, 550 in October and finally 600 from OAW in September/October, for an overall total of more than 1600 D Vas. The new type began to reach the *Jagdstaffeln* in October 1917.

VERDUN FRONT

Albatros pilots fighting over the Ypres Salient were not the only hard-pressed *Jagdflieger* in the autumn of 1917. In the 5. *Armee* sector opposite Verdun, the aerial conflict could also be intense. Operating on this front was *Jagdgruppe* 'von Braun', which included *Staffeln* 14, 16b, 21, 22, 23b and 32b.

One 20-year-old pilot flying with *Jasta* 32b scored his second victory at this time. Rudolf Windisch had been born in Dresden on 27 January 1897, and went to war in the 12. *Königlich-Sächsisches Infanterie-Regiment Nr 177*. After being wounded in November 1914, he finally won his way into the air service. After his own training, Windisch spent a frustrating year as a flying instructor at FEA 6, but was posted to FFA 62 on 1 May 1916, where he received a hearty welcome from fellow Saxon Max Immelmann. After FFA 62 was transferred to the Eastern Front, Uffz Windisch teamed up with observer Oblt Max von Cossell to fly many daring missions, and they even downed a Russian balloon.

Undoubtedly their most audacious action occurred in the early morning hours of 2 October 1916, when Windisch flew far behind the Russian lines in a Roland C II and landed von Cossell close to the

Ltn d R Rudolf 'Rudi' Windisch of Bavarian *Jasta* 32 flew this zebra-striped D V at Landreville, circa September 1917. Along with the black/white fuselage striping and the black(?) tail assembly, the markings of this aircraft included two white six-pointed stars on the upper wing surfaces
(J Mückler/T Phillips)



Dubnow–Rowno railway line. After Windisch took off, von Cossell planted explosives under the tracks and detonated them just as a train was passing. The next morning Windisch returned and picked up von Cossell, and the two returned to a glorious welcome. Windisch was decorated with the Prussian Crown Order IV Class with Swords and the Saxon St Henry Medal in Silver.

Eager for even more aggressive duties, Windisch wound up in *Jasta* 32 in February 1917. On 19 September, he finally accounted for his first enemy aeroplane – a French AR two-seater over Fleury. Eight days later, he downed a SPAD near Betherville, and this was followed by three more SPADs in November. Windisch was destined for even greater success.

Theodor Rumpel of *Jasta* 16b was still flying in the same *Armee* as Windisch at this time, and he wrote;

‘Hanstein was nominated commander of *Jasta* 35, and I joined my good old friend Otto Kissenberth, who left *Jasta* 16 to join *Jasta* 23 as its commanding officer.

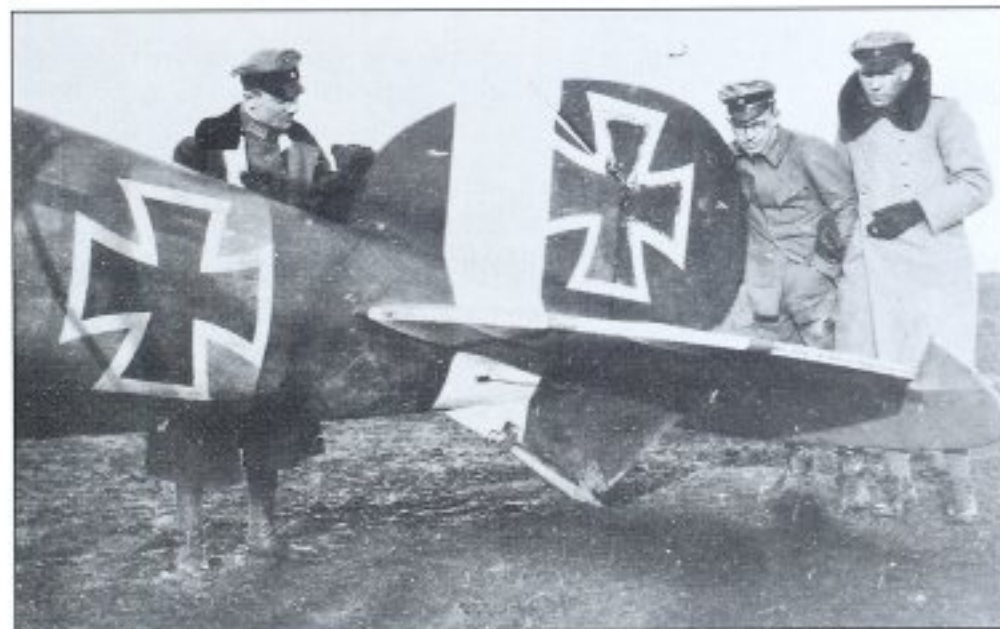
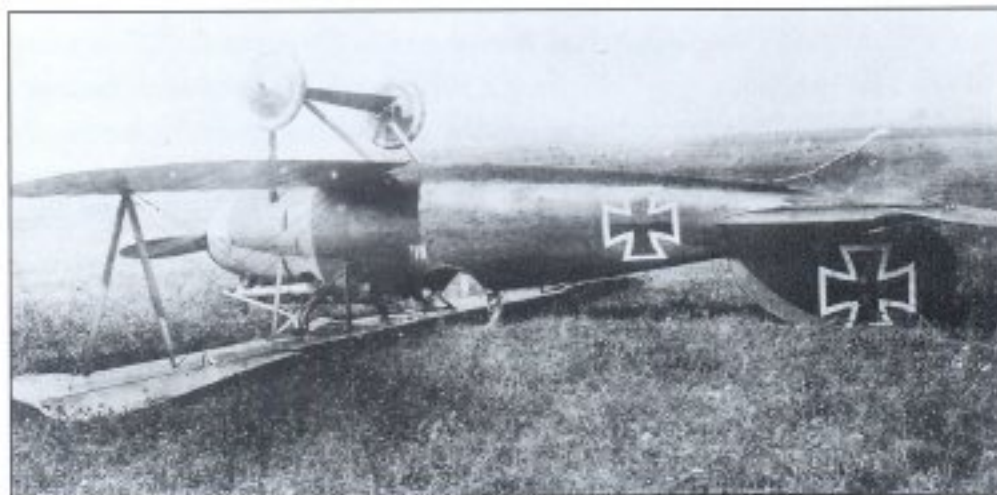
‘These were vivid times all over the front. We flew three to four sorties per day, each lasting two hours, and we would go to bed right after supper. It was not unusual for five or six French fighter squadrons to scrap with just two or three *Jagdstaffeln*, and it was a hard game. Kissenberth was very successful during this period, and I scored my third victory on 19 September – a SPAD fighter. On 12 December I managed to down another SPAD for my fourth victory.’

Bespectacled Otto Kissenberth was indeed on a winning streak at



Vfw Franz Schmid was one of Windisch's fellow pilots in *Jasta* 32b. He flew an Albatros D V identified by this beautiful eagle insignia, which was copied from a poster advertisement for the Rumpler aircraft firm (T Phillips)

Theodor Rumpel apparently flew this Albatros D V soon after arriving at *Jasta* 23b on 18 September 1917. His album caption for this shot was, ‘How my red crate was killed (destroyed), September 1917’. The well-known *Jasta* 23b unit marking of a white band on the tail section was apparently not yet in use, but the fuselage and tail section were certainly red (HAC/UTD)



Ltn d R Max Gossner, *Staffelführer* Lt. d R Otto Kissenberth (with glasses) and Rumpel were photographed with the tail section of a *Jasta* 23b Albatros. Rumpel wrote, ‘The *Staffel* marking of *Jasta* 23 was a broad white stripe completely around the fin and stabiliser of the aircraft. In addition, each pilot carried his own personal marking.’ As seen here, the white stripe was generally bordered in black and supplemented with black colouration on the aft fuselage (HAC/UTD)



Along with his mechanics, Ltn d R Theodor Rumpel poses with his green *Jasta* 23b Albatros D V during the winter of 1917–18. According to Rumpel, 'All (my) subsequent aeroplanes were painted green in honour of my regimental unit when I was a cavalry officer' (HAC/UTD)

This classic photograph is one of several taken on 1 August 1917, capturing Offz Stv Max Müller with his *Jasta* 28 D V 1154/17. The stylised insignia on the fuselage may represent a comet, and it is thought to have been black with white outlines. The *Staffel* marking of a yellow tailplane and elevator with two black chordwise stripes was also applied

Karl-Emil Schäfer and his successor Otto Hartmann, he had little good to say about Thuy. On 30 October Müller wrote;

'On the 22nd I shot down two Englishmen out of a squadron. I had positioned myself above them and shot first one and then the other down, by which time the others had disappeared in a steep glide. A third one, from the same squadron, was shot down by a wingman. Ltn Thuy hasn't caught one yet.'

It has been speculated that perhaps as a *Pour le Mérite* man with 27 victories, Müller may well have felt he should have been given command of the *Jasta* instead of Thuy. Whatever the reason, Müller requested a transfer out of *Jasta* 28. On 8 November he wrote;

'This is to inform you that I am back with *Jagdstaffel* Boelcke. You know why! Besides, there are some nice, very courageous gentlemen here.'

Another unit engaged in bitter fighting against the RFC at this time was the distinguished *Jasta* 18. Oblt Rudolf Berthold arrived from *Jasta* 14 on 12 August to take command. By October the *Staffel* was based at Harlebeke in the 4. *Armee*.

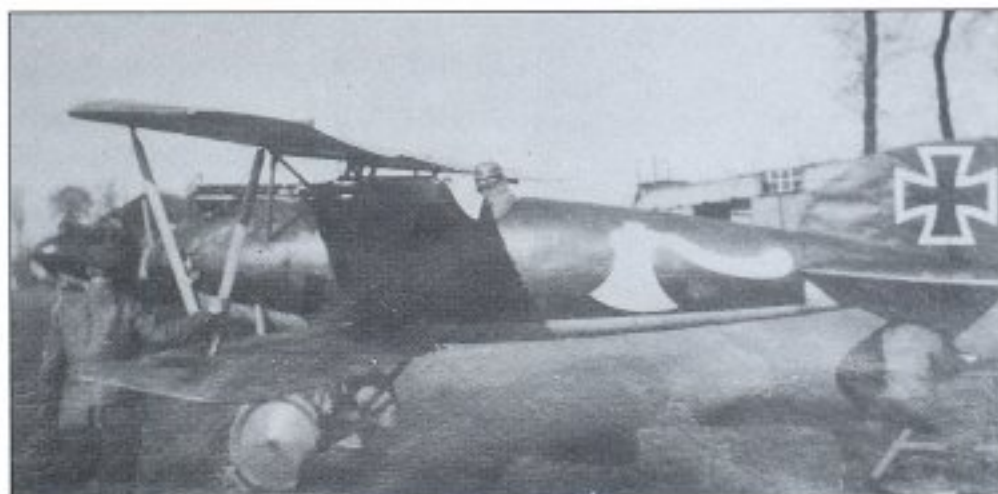
One of the best pilots in the *Jasta* was Ltn d R Paul Strähle, a Württemberger born in Schorndorf on 20 May 1893. In 1913 he had joined the *Lufschiffer-Bataillon* IV, and made many flights in Zeppelin Z VII.

this time, claiming six French aircraft in August and five more in September.

Kissenberth's fellow Bavarian Ltn Max Müller was still a thorn in the side of the RFC in Flanders. However, like many other *Staffeln*, Müller's *Jasta* 28 had suffered significant losses – including two commanders killed in September. On the 29th, Ltn d R Emil Thuy arrived from *Jasta* 21 with 15 victories to take over the *Staffel*.

While Müller's letters had been full of praise for *Jasta* commander





Ltn d R Paul Strähle runs up the engine of his D V 4594/17 as mechanics hold down the tail. While the machine still bears the colours it displayed during Strähle's *Jasta 18* service, this photograph was taken at the Wasquehal airfield of *Jasta 57* probably around February 1918. It was painted in the 'Berthold colours' of a dark blue fuselage and red nose, with the pilot's personal battle-axe insignia. Strähle was allowed to bring this machine with him to *Jasta 57*, where he continued to fly it in its old colours for a while

After a series of transfers and several attempts, Strähle finally managed to obtain a posting for pilot training at Köslin, in Pomerania. Following brief service in two-seaters, he went through the *Jagdfliegerschule* at Köln, then arrived at *Jasta 18* in early November 1916. Strähle scored his initial victory on St Valentine's Day of 1917, and had increased his tally to six by 26 May. His war diary provides an informative glimpse of *Jasta* operations, and the limitations of the Albatros fighters:

'17 August – flying D III 1970/16, I abandon the patrol, as my machine cannot keep up with the formation, and pursue five or six enemy machines. I fired at one of the enemy with my right machine gun, then both guns jammed. My machine is just not good enough for dogfighting.

'18 August – shortly after take-off, five SPADs that had been above the clouds attacked our formation, firing tracer ammunition. They were all superior to us in speed, so a successful scrap was not possible.'

Later that same day, Strähle had an opportunity to fly a captured SPAD VII, and found 'it is very good, but a little unstable. The feeling of safety is greater than in an Albatros.'

By 10 October Strähle was flying D V 4594/17 – a machine that he would regularly use for seven months, completing more than 130 frontline flights in that time. On that date he recorded in his war diary:

'Dogfights with several formations of SE 5s, DH 4s and triplanes. Oblt Berthold was severely wounded in the right arm (bone shattered). Ltn (Otto) Schober hit in radiator and force landed at Heule. Other formations of Albatros machines joined the fight. Oblt Berthold landed safely at our airfield in spite of half-severed ailerons and heavy bleeding from his wound.'

Berthold would not return to *Jasta 18* until March 1918, and Oblt Ernst Turck took his place as CO.

In the 4. *Armee* sector, heavy rains had hampered both the British ground and aerial forces in their assaults against Passchendaele Ridge during October. Just to the south

Ltn d R Viktor Schobinger poses with his black Albatros D V of *Jasta 12*. Reportedly, this was the former machine of Oblt von Tutschek, who was badly wounded on 11 August 1917. Schobinger took over the *Staffel* two days later, and he apparently also took over von Tutschek's D V as a reserve aircraft. This machine would soon be painted with Schobinger's personal embellishment of a light blue oblong or cylinder symbol on the fuselage (HAC/UTD)





was the 6. *Armee*, which included among its aerial contingent *Jasta* 12 at Roucourt and *Jasta* 30 at Phalempin. Celebrated *Jasta* 12 commander Adolf von Tutschek had been badly wounded in the shoulder on 11 August when his black Albatros D V had been downed by ace Flt Lt C D Booker of '8 Naval'. Von Tutschek's comrade Ltn Viktor Schobinger immediately attacked Booker and shot up his Sopwith Triplane, forcing the British pilot to land, and perhaps saving von Tutschek's life.

From his hospital bed, von Tutschek saw to it that Schobinger was named his successor. For the next nine weeks Schobinger led *Jasta* 12 to 19 victories without the loss of a single pilot. On 21 October Schobinger and the pilots of *Jasta* 12 made a skilful attack on a formation of eight RE 8s from No 59 Sqn, as well as their two escorting Camels. Schobinger succeeded in forcing RE 8 A3859 to land behind German lines, where its wounded crew were captured. According to the *Jasta* records, this was the 100th victory of *Jasta* 12 (although other accounts by various sources have the 100th victory coming on 31 October, also by Schobinger), and the fuselage of the RE 8 was suitably labelled as such by Schobinger's mechanics. Schobinger went on to raise his score to eight prior to being wounded in the foot on 15 November, thus ending his frontline career.

As October 1917 drew to a close, the weather continued to worsen with the approaching winter. Airmen on both sides welcomed the frequent respites from operational flying. However, determined Albatros pilots could still achieve significant results, and use the heavy cloud cover to their advantage.

On 18 November, Offz Stv Julius Buckler of *Jasta* 17 (now based at Wasquehal, still in the 4. *Armee*) flew his Albatros D V *Mops* off into a thick fog, with what he said was a ceiling of 100 metres. Sighting a balloon over Zillebeke Lake, near Ypres, he 'dived into the mist' and flew blind for about six minutes, then flamed the British gasbag. As Buckler returned homeward, half-lost in the murk, he stumbled on another balloon and fired at it. Although British records prove that only one balloon was lost

Classic view of D V and D III fighters of *Jasta* 12 under Schobinger's command at Roucourt in late summer 1917. All of the aeroplanes display the *Staffel* marking of a black tail – even the AEG C IV 'hack' two-seater. The first two D Vs in line were both flown by Schobinger, and displayed his light blue emblem. The first D V appears to have 'lozenge fabric' wings, while the second has painted camouflage. The sixth aircraft is the D V of Ltn d R Friedrich Hochstetter. It was marked with a 'stacked shot' insignia to indicate his previous service in the artillery (T Phillips)



Jasta 17's leading ace, Julius Buckler, wears a full-length greatcoat with fur collar in this view taken at Wasquehal airfield in the autumn of 1917. The dark-painted tail (black?) was the unit marking at this time. Buckler's usual Mops insignia is not to be seen – the wings were covered in five-colour 'lozenge' fabric. Note the rack of signal cartridges mounted below the cockpit (HAC/UTD)

this day, Buckler received credit for two. On an afternoon sortie that same day, he went on to down an RE 8 of No 9 Sqn RFC (which landed near Langemarck, behind the British lines, with both crewmen unharmed).

Having performed the 'hat trick' of three in one day, Buckler was even more pleased to learn later that he had been promoted to *leutnant der reserve*. A boisterous celebration followed until late that evening.

Only two days later, on the 20th, the famous 'Tank Battle of Cambrai' opened on the 2. *Armee* sector. The British First and Third Armies sent 381 tanks against the German trenches from Gonnelleu to Havrincourt, without the usual preparatory barrage. When the battle began, the

A different D V of Buckler's clearly displays the Mops titling, and serves as a backdrop for these Jasta 17 mechanics at Wasquehal. The aircraft also sported the dark tail unit, and this time Mops appeared in white letters against a two-colour band. Jasta 17 was at Wasquehal, with its well-camouflaged hangars, from 28 August to 6 November 1917 (HAC/UTD)



2. *Armee* possessed only one fighter unit – *Jasta 5* – but it was soon reinforced with the arrival of JG I and *Jasta 15*. Buckler's *Jasta 17* moved to the 2. *Armee* as part of the response.

On 30 November the Germans launched a highly successful counter-attack and regained the ground they had lost, but that day Buckler was grievously wounded and crashed in No-Man's Land. The counter-attacking troops found him pinned in the wreckage of his D V, and he was taken to a field hospital. He was still in hospital when he received his *Pour le Mérite* on 3 December. Buckler would return to combat in March 1918 and, despite yet another wound (his fifth), survive the war with 36 victories.

Buckler's friend, and frequent wingman, Vfw Georg Strasser took up the gauntlet in his absence. Flying D V 4408/17 on 10 December, he flamed a French balloon of the 92e *Cie de Aéroliers* at Jussy for his sixth victory. Two days later he switched to a British 'gasbag' at Villers Faucon, which he torched at 1550 hrs for his seventh, and final, victory. Strasser too survived the war, but died in a flying accident on 4 December 1925.

At the very end of the third year of the war, there were 513 Albatros D V fighters reported at the front, as well as 186 of the new D Va types and 423 D IIIs. It was the period of maximum deployment of the D V. While there were 390 Pfalz fighters recorded and 35 Fokker Dr Is, Albatros types still made up 71 percent of all frontline fighters. As 1917 gave way to 1918, Albatros pilots would continue to shoulder the bulk of fighter operations against numerically superior foes with increasingly better machines. And two old friends from Württemberg *Jasta 28* who had gained glory over the Ypres Salient paid the ultimate price.

Ltn d R Ernst Hess brought his score from two to 14 in three months of non-stop combat at *Jasta 28*. In late September he was given command of *Jasta 19* in the 1. *Armee*, where he increased his tally to 17. On 23 December, Hess took off in D Va 5347/17 to lead his unit in an interception of an enemy formation. As he attacked one aircraft, he was hit by fire from a second, taking a bullet to the head. His Albatros hit the ground and burst into flames. Hess's body was returned to Wiesbaden on the final day of 1917, and buried on 3 January.



Buckler takes an informal pose with his D V *Mops* at Wasquehal. The flare cartridge rack and tubular gunsight were common accessories on many German fighters (HAC/UTD)

Pictured in late 1917 with his D V, named *Ly*, is Vfw Georg Strasser of *Jasta 17*. By this time the *Staffel* marking had been altered to a white fin with a dark (black?) rudder. This was probably 4408/17, and it sported a lovely heart emblem on a stylised white background (HAC/UTD)



Right

In one of his last photographs, Lt n d R Ernst Hess of Württemberg *Jasta* 28 stands by his D V. Hess scored his fourth victory (27 July 1917) through his fourteenth (16 September 1917) in Albatros D III 2041/16. His combat reports describe the D III as having a green fuselage from the cockpit aft, with the unit's yellow and black striped tail. This D V may well have had a green fuselage as well (HAC/UTD)



Above

Max Müller poses in his flying togs by the nose of his D V 1154/17. This aircraft also displayed a black 'M' marked on the underside of each bottom wing, and a portion of that marking is just visible. On 26 August Müller was given an Active, or Regular, commission by the Bavarian Army as a lieutenant in the *Flieger-Bataillon* – a unique honour (HAC/UTD)

In a letter written in June 1917, Max Müller told his father his aircraft was being painted differently every two weeks. Müller is seen at left with a D V that still bears his stylised 'comet' emblem, but has now been painted with a very dark colour on the fuselage. This was probably D V 1154/17 repainted, possibly red. Müller's 'M' initials can just be made out on the underside of the bottom wings



Hess's old comrade Max Müller had come a long way. As a 29-victory ace with *Jasta* Boelcke, Müller was the second leading living German ace after von Richthofen (Gontermann, with 39, had died in the crash of his Fokker Dr I on 30 October). Müller resumed scoring on 7 November with a SPAD, followed by an SE 5 on the 11th and a DH 5 on the 29th. On 6 January 1918, the *Jasta* Boelcke CO, Lt n Walter von Bülow, was killed within British lines. Müller no doubt expected the mantle of leadership of the prestigious *Staffel* to fall on his shoulders, but once again he was disappointed. He was named 'acting commander', and led the unit in the air, but was not fully a permanent *Staffelführer*.

Only three days later, Müller flew D Va 5405/17 at the head of six *Staffel* mates on a patrol. He pressed home a rash attack on a No 21 Sqn RE 8 flown by Capt G Zimmer and observer 2Lt H A Somerville, his reckless approach bringing him right into the path of an accurate burst from Somerville's gun. The Albatros burst into flames, and the other *Jasta* Boelcke pilots watched in horror as Müller's figure left the blazing D V and plummeted to earth. In early 1918, Bavaria's highest scoring *Jagdflieger* was posthumously awarded the Knight's Cross of the Military Max-Joseph order, giving him the title Max *Ritter* von Müller.



KAISERSCHLACHT AND BEYOND

Some readers might well view the inventory of German fighters at the front on 31 December 1917 and wonder at the large number of Albatros D III types (423) still in service at this time. After all, the D III had first arrived at the front a full year before. Even more noteworthy is the fact that on 28 February 1918, there were still 357 D IIIs recorded, as opposed to 250 D V types and 475 D VAs.

Most of the D IIIs flying in early 1918 would have been OAW-built versions, which were still in production in September 1917. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that the OAW-built D III was constructed more sturdily than the Johannisthal-built version. At any rate, the D III (OAW) was probably a better aircraft than the D V. Even von Richthofen is said to have preferred the D III to the D V. OAW-built D IIIs were available in quantity, and several new *Amerikaprogramm* fighter *Staffeln* would be equipped with these machines in early 1918.

Royal Prussian *Jasta* 50 was apparently one such unit. Formed as FEA 13 in Bromberg, *Jagdstaffel* 50 was first stationed at Marle-Autremencourt in the 7. *Armee* on 11 January 1918. The first *Staffelführer* was the highly capable Ltnd R Heinrich Arntzen, born on 11 September 1894 in Aubolt. He was an old hand, having flown many reconnaissance and photography missions as an observer in 1914–15 in FFA 34 and later in FFA 2, with whom he was wounded on 20 March 1915. Returning to action, Arntzen scored his first victory as an observer with pilot Vfw Bruno Schwabe on 1 April 1916 over Verdun. He successfully claimed three more aircraft as an observer before going to pilot training. Arntzen's first posting as a *Jagdflieger* took him to *Jasta* 15, where he scored twice more flying the Albatros D V and Pfalz D III.

As leader of the new *Jasta* 50, he drew first blood for his unit at 1045 hrs on 25 January 1918 when he burned a balloon of the 43e *Compagnie de Aéroliers* near Pontavert. Four days later he was credited with an RE 8 at 1305 hrs at La Fère as his eighth success, and the second for *Jasta* 50. That same day one of his pilots, Vfw Josef Kettel, was killed in D III (OAW) 2370/17.

On 12 February Arntzen ignited a balloon from the 45e *Cie de Aéroliers* for the third victory credited to his *Staffel*, which would specialise in 'sausage roasting' for a short period. On 21 March – the day the great Spring Offensive commenced – Arntzen torched the

Staffelführer of the new *Jasta* 50, Ltnd R Heinrich Arntzen is flanked by his groundcrew in front of D III (OAW) 2380/17. It appears that the aircraft's guns have been removed for servicing. Arntzen's favoured personal emblem of a Prussian observer's badge (black/white bordered in red) was applied to the fuselage. OAW-built D IIIs featured a rounded rudder like that fitted to the D V, as well as distinctive national insignia style and placement



fifth balloon credited to *Jasta* 50. Eight days later he was awarded the 'Hohenzollern'. On 23 April Arntzen destroyed a French two-seater for his 11th victory, but it was to be his last, for on 27 May he received severe head wounds from anti-aircraft fire. He made it back to the German lines safely but lost an eye. Arntzen's career as a *Jagdflieger* was over.

Another new *Staffel* equipped largely with the OAW-built D III was *Jasta* 57, which formed up at *Flieger-Beobachter-Schule* Königsberg on 6 January 1918. Lt n d R Paul Strähle (with seven victories) was brought in from *Jasta* 18 as commander, and the unit arrived at the 6. *Armee* front on the 24th. Its first base was the well-used airfield at Wasquehal, near Lille.

Strähle's diary from this period details the hectic activity as he collected D IIIs from AFP 6 near Tournai, and assembled and trained his green pilots. He was allowed to bring his Albatros D V with him from his old *Staffel*, and also brought two *Jasta* 18 pilots along as well – Uffz Max Hitschler and Lt n Hans Viebig (five victories).

In January/February, it was these two experienced hands who flew most of the sorties, and who bore the brunt of the formation flying drills Strähle insisted on. He tried three practice flights with eight of his pilots on 27 February, and reported of the first one, 'First *Staffel* exercise, formation flying, following detailed theoretical instructions. Flying very good, but sometimes highly dangerous.' Then, 'Further practice, not quite good enough yet.' On the third flight of the day, 'I flew alongside them to see which pilots were too far apart. On landing, Uffz Wieprich collided with Lt n Haffner on the ground. Both machines were damaged, but the pilots unhurt.'

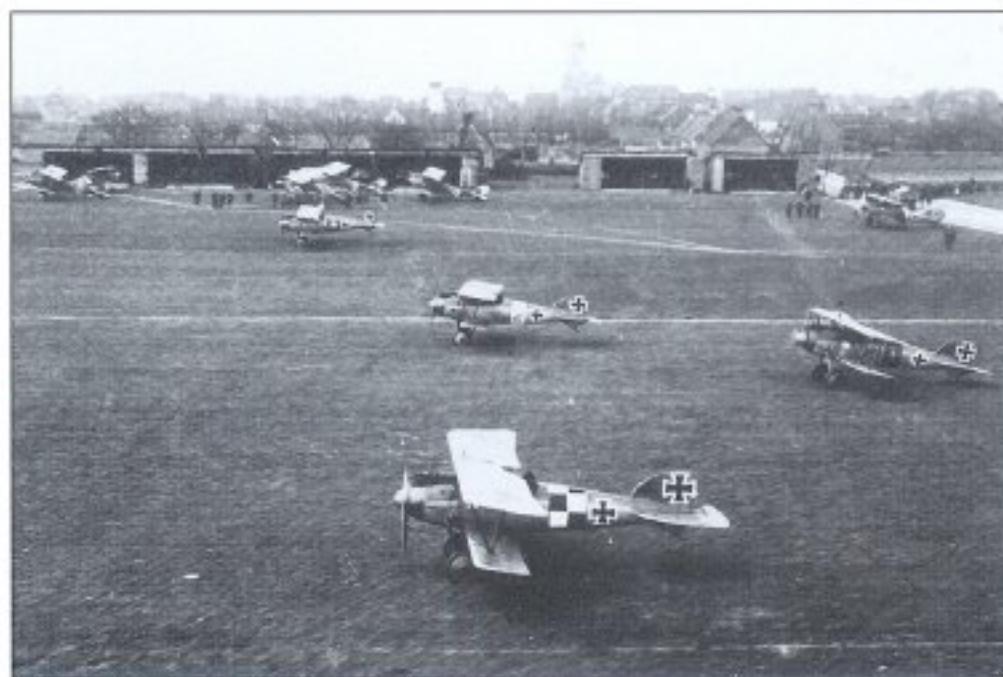
On 3 March he led one of the unit's first front patrols and reported 'Formation adequate'. One week later Strähle could happily report, 'Fight with RE 8s over Arleuse. Viebig and Gefr Sielemann each shot one down.' His new *Staffel* had been blooded, and gruelling days were ahead. Strähle would alternate between his old D V 4594/17 and a new D III (OAW) 2385/17 in the weeks to come.

MARINE FELD JAGDSTAFFEL I

Army pilots were not the only ones flying Albatros fighters. The *Marine* (German Navy) land-based fighter forces in Flanders also flew colourful Albatros D III, D V and D Va types with success. The primary personality and driving force behind German Naval land-based fighter aviation was Lt n zur See Gotthard Sachsenberg.

Born on 6 December 1892, Sachsenberg had been headed for a career as a deck officer in the regular navy, having served as a 21-year-old *Seekadett* on the cruiser *Hertha* in April 1913. At an unknown date he transferred to naval aviation and spent time as an observer in a two-seater unit. Around September 1915, Sachsenberg was returned to the *Marine Flugdepot* at Johannisthal for a period as an instructor. There, he learned to fly in his off-duty hours, and later took the Fokker monoplane conversion course at Mannheim.

Sachsenberg returned to the front as a Fokker Eindecker pilot, and flew in that capacity in the summer and autumn of 1916. The *Marine Feld Jagdstaffel* was formed on 1 February 1917 (although that designation may not have gone into effect until 1 May, and the Roman numeral 'I' was later added). The first entry in the war diary of the MFJ was made on 7



This dramatic action shot features Ltn z S Gotthard Sachsenberg, leader of *Marine Feld Jasta I*, taking off from Aertrycke airfield. Sachsenberg's Albatros D Va was marked with a quartered black and white band on the fuselage, as well as additional yellow unit markings typically found on MFJ aircraft (A Imrie via HAC/UTD)

Ltn z S Sachsenberg is seen at extreme right (facing the camera), showing off his D Va to *Marineflugchef Kapitän zur See Kranzbühler*. In this view it is apparent that a narrow border (possibly yellow) was applied to the black/white quartered fuselage band. Most *Marine Feld Jasta* Albatros fighters also displayed a field-applied mottled camouflage in green and purple, painted onto the top and sides of the fuselage (J Leckscheid)



February 1917 when Vzflgmrstr Wirtz shot down an RNAS Sopwith. In the early 1930s Sachsenberg wrote a brief history of his unit, and he takes up the story (translated by O'Brien Browne);

'On 1 May 1917, as leader of the I. *Marine Feld Jagdstaffel*, I successfully led the new unit, now equipped with modern Albatros D III aircraft, to the frontlines before Dixmuiden from the small field of Aertrycke. The year-long unsuccessful activities of my small unit, equipped with old aeroplanes, had produced within me and my

comrades the will to transform our many experiences into unlimited successes, as we were now fitted out with new aircraft. Like birds of prey, we hurled ourselves upon our opponents, who we could reach for the first time, given the superior speed of our aircraft. On 1 May 1917, the day the *Staffel* was founded, we reported to the section in charge of us that three of us had caught and downed four Belgian and English aircraft in battle.

'And then we had some hot times. The battle in the Ypres Salient had been commenced by our opponent with great numerical superiority. Along with heavy losses that nearly wiped out the entire *Staffel*, the young *Marine Feld Jagdstaffel* I had quickly scored some successes (author's note – from June through November 1917, MFJ I lost eight pilots killed and three wounded or injured in exchange for 29 victories).

'This situation made it easier, in the Summer and Autumn of 1917, to obtain permission through the Admiral's staff to set up a second *Staffel*, which I assigned to my old courageous frontline comrade Ltn (Theodor) Osterkamp, and which was created from the first one. A short time later, a third *Staffel* was formed out of both of these *Staffeln*, these three being unified into a *Jagdgruppe*. In early 1918 (sic), these units, along with two additional *Staffeln* which had previously been part of the *Seefrontstaffeln*, were combined into the *Marine-Jagdgeschwader Flandern*, which was entrusted to my leadership as commander (officially, the *Marine-*

Jagdgeschwader was not formed until mid-October 1918, but it seems the *Jagdgruppe* was acting in that function early on).

The first examples of the Albatros D Va had arrived at MFJ I in October 1917 as replacements for some of the unit's older D III, D V and Pfalz D III types, and five D Va aircraft and two D Vs were assigned to the unit on 3 December. Fifteen days later Sachsenberg was credited with downing a 'Sopwith two-seater' as his eighth victory, and the

44th for the *Staffel*. His ninth victory came on 17 March 1918 with a 'Breguet' downed at Pervyse, which some sources cite as the 51st *Staffel* victory. He joined the ranks of the ten-victory *Kanonnen* on 25 April, and then he shot a DH 9 from No 211 Sqn into the sea off Mariakerke on 21 May. Sachsenberg added another Airco (de Havilland) bomber on 29 May, followed by a SPAD on 2 June for his 13th victory.

The unit was still flying Albatros fighters at this time, for Flugmt Horst Sawatzki was shot down in D Va 4635/17 on 2 June, and ten days later Ltn d R Gerhard Schulze was killed in D Va 7337/17. However, that same day the first Fokker D VIIs were assigned to the *Staffel*, and gradually the remaining Albatros D Va machines were replaced.

OFFENSIVE PREPARATIONS

During February 1918, there was intense activity behind the German lines as preparations were made for the massive Spring Offensive slated for March. The war in Russia had been successfully concluded (an armistice would go into effect on 3 March) and thousands of enthusiastic and veteran German troops were released for duty on the Western Front. Gens Ludendorff and Hindenburg decided a massive breakthrough was necessary to force a military victory before the might of the United States' manpower and industrial strength could be introduced into the war.

The offensive was slated for 21 March, and would be carried out by three armies. In the centre, the 2. *Armee* would drive toward Péronne. To the north, the new 17. *Armee* would push toward Bapaume, while to the south, the 18. *Armee* would aim for Ham, on the Somme. The assault front was some 75 kilometres wide from the Scarpe in the north to the Oise in the south. The plan selected for the offensive was code-named



A useful rear view of Sachsenberg's Albatros D Va at MFJ I. This perspective illustrates the five-colour printed camouflage fabric on the wings and tailplane (J Rhyeuß)

The land-based fighter units of the German Navy flew Albatros fighters quite late into the summer of 1918. Ltn d R d MA Lothar Wieland of *Seefrontstaffel I* force-landed this Albatros D Va 7327/17 after he was wounded in a fierce combat with six Camels from No 213 Sqn on 30 July 1918. At 1500 hrs that day, Wieland was cut off from the rest of his formation by the Camels and hit in the left ankle by a ricocheting bullet. He somehow managed to bring the riddled D Va back to Neumünster and land, but he would lose his left leg (C Westerman)



Operation *Michael*, but the entire battle is better known by the name selected by Ludendorff himself to honour his supreme warlord – *Kaiserschlacht* (Emperor's Battle).

On the day of the attack, it was planned that the three assaulting armies should have an allocation of some 35 *Jagdstaffeln*, which would increase to 42 during the battle. One *Jagdgeschwader* was assigned to each army (JG II and III had been formed on 2 February). The Germans took extreme care to conceal the build-up of aerial forces in the three armies from prying Allied reconnaissance aircraft.

Von Richthofen's JG I would be part of the aerial might assembled in the 2. *Armee*, as was *Jasta* 37 at Le Cateau. The latter unit, however, would participate in the offensive without its accomplished commander. Ernst Udet had scored his last Albatros victory on 18 February, when he brought down a Camel at Zandvoorde for his 20th confirmed claim. On 18 March he transferred to *Jasta* 11 in JG I, and began flying the agile Fokker Dr I under von Richthofen's leadership. Udet would go on to enjoy great success with the Fokker D VII, surviving the war as Germany's ranking living ace with 62 victories.

Bavarian *Jasta* 23 was transferred from the 7. *Armee* to Aniche in the 17. *Armee* sector for the offensive. Theodor Rumpel wrote;

'In February, *Jasta* 23 was transferred to the English front – something for which we had hoped for a long time because the British fighter boys were enthusiastic and sporty scrappers. Often, there were about 100 fighter aeroplanes in the air from either side from a height of approximately 4000 metres on down to 1000 metres.'

In the pre-dawn darkness of 21 March 1918, Operation *Michael* began, with 10,000 German artillery pieces opening a thunderous fire on the mist-enshrouded front at 0445 hrs. Some 1,160,000 shells were fired in five hours, pounding the British and French lines to a depth of 20 miles. The German stormtroopers went over the top at about 0940 hrs and advanced behind a creeping barrage through a murky fog. The same thick mist that aided the German ground forces kept German aircraft grounded in all three attacking armies until midday. After the weather cleared a bit, the heavily concentrated *Jagdstaffeln* achieved air superiority and protected the army cooperation aircraft on their vital duties.

From his base at Wasquehal, just to the north of the 17. *Armee* sector, Paul Strähle led seven of his pilots to assist in the battle, and almost

Ernst Udet modified the heraldry of *Jasta* 37 after he took command in November 1917. In addition to the diagonally striped tailplanes, the markings now included black struts, wheel covers and fuselage décor. A white number on the nose and white symbols on the fuselage identified individual machines – the number was also applied on the underside of the bottom wing. This superb line-up of D Va types and one D III at Wynghene, in Flanders, illustrates these markings. Udet's D Va, which bore a white chevron and LO emblem, is at the far end (A Imrie via HAC/UTD)



fell victim to the fog of war and the inexperience of his men. His diary reads;

'First day of the offensive south of the Scarpe – terrific barrage on the English trenches. At the 17. *Armee* front, six DH 4s attacked us in turn, but when we retaliated they dived away. Our own artillery shot shells directly in front of us – black smoke. We could hear the shrapnel whistle. Four or five Sopwith single-seaters (red noses, the "anti-Richthofen squadron") attacked us. Big dog-fight during which Uffz Wenn spun down. Suddenly, I heard shooting right behind me and saw one of our own machines (Gefr Sielemann) firing at me at very close range. I took evasive action, but he fired another burst, whereupon I spun away and flew home. My machine (D V 4594/17) had about 30 hits in the tail area. Riddled! Only because I was in a turn, and Sielemann aimed at the middle, did I escape.'

After landing, Strähle confronted Sielemann, who sheepishly apologised. They had been engaged with red-nosed Camels (which Strähle and others mistakenly believed to be a mythical squadron dedicated to von Richthofen's demise), and Sielemann somehow mistook his leader's red-nosed Albatros D V for one of the Camels. Strähle let the green pilot off with a stern rebuke, and Sielemann returned to flying patrols – only to be shot down and made a PoW six days later.

In the intense aerial combat that developed in the afternoon of *Der Tag*, 18 aircraft were credited to the *Jasta* airmen – most of whom were flying Albatros or Pfalz fighters. The Germans retained control of the air for the next three days, and claimed 33 machines downed on the 24th. In the 17. *Armee*, Theodor Rumpel described his own experience of these hot times;

'21 March 1918 was the day the Great German Offensive started, and we flew at least four sorties a day. 24 March was unlucky for me. I was flying in the rear of the squadron, and observed an SE 5 approaching. Since he was at quite a distance, I did not think he would open fire, but he did and I was hit in the right shoulder. My arm was broken and flailed out of the cockpit and, when diving down, I could feel my right arm dangling against the fuselage in the wind behind the cockpit.

'The same bullet hit my fuel tank, which was in front of the pilot's seat, and I was bathed in fuel and blood. I switched off ignition as I approached the ground, which was clouded with artillery fire. I decided



This remarkable photograph, taken from above Ernst Udet as he looped his black Albatros D Va, reveals the underside markings of his fighter. Udet used his 'U' initial in place of the numbers which the other *Jasta* 37 aircraft displayed on their lower wings. Such markings on the wing undersides were meant to facilitate aircraft identification and confirmation of victory claims by ground observers (A Imrie)

An OAW-built Albatros D III of *Jasta* 57 warms up on Wasquehal airfield. The *Staffelführer* Paul Strähle instituted the *Staffel* marking of a light blue vertical tail unit and fuselage from the cockpit aft. Strähle did not place a high value on ornate fuselage insignia for personal identification, and instead ordered that each pilot's machine would be identified by a differently coloured nose



to gamble. I flipped on ignition, opened throttle and pulled back on the stick with my left hand, and prayed that the Albatros wouldn't burst into flames. When I started to level off, my right arm flew back into the cockpit, where it remained motionless and useless. Muscles could still cause my fingers to move, but my elbow and shoulder remained dead. Just as I was about to pass out from loss of blood and fumes from the leaking fuel, I found my airfield and touched down safely, utilising the controls with my left hand only.

'When my aeroplane came to a halt I was unable to move, and my mechanics appeared and pulled me out of the cockpit. My old friend Kissenberth came on the scene with a bottle of Cognac to soothe the pain. Thus ended my career as a *Jagdflieger* in the first war. I was operated on 15 times during the next 18 months, and was fortunate to retain my arm, but the use was limited because of a completely stiff shoulder.'

On the same day Rumpel was wounded, Ltn d R Rudolf Windisch took off with much better results. The Saxon ace was now in command of the new *Jasta* 66. Although the unit was located in the 7. *Armee* on the southern flank of Operation *Michael*, Windisch still contributed to the carnage inflicted on the Allied aerial forces. He reported;

'On 24 March 1918, I took off at 1335 hrs with Vfw (Walter) Schäfer and Offz Stv (Walter) Beyer of my *Jagdstaffel* 66 for a front patrol. North of Chauny, we were attacked by seven SPADs and had a dogfight for about ten minutes, after which the enemy aeroplanes retreated. After that, I met a SPAD circling between Chauny and Ablecourt, which I had had under observation for a long time. Near Manicamp, I caught up with him and fired at a distance of 200–300 metres, after which my guns jammed. The enemy flier – a SPAD two-seater – went down slowly in the direction of Noyon towards the ground and then, near Bretigny, turned over on the ground and began to burn.

'At 1610 hrs I took off again with four aircraft of my *Staffel*. As we flew over Chauny at 300 metres, I saw a squadron of enemy SPADs. We climbed to 3300 metres to get above the squadron, which contained about 12 to 14 SPADs. The enemy flew over Chauny-Tergniers to just before La Fere, where the other four aircraft and myself attacked. I began shooting at the highest SPAD of the enemy squadron from a short distance, and he went down in a curve. The impact followed, according to Gefr (Erich) Sonneck,



Ltn d R Max Gossner flew in *Jasta* 23b alongside such luminaries as Otto Kissenberth, Ltn d R Fritz von Röth and Theodor Rumpel. Ltn Heinrich Seywald's Albatros D V can be seen in the background. It sported the usual *Jasta* tail markings, along with Seywald's 'S' monogram on a black-bordered white band. Seywald would eventually command *Jasta* 23b and attain six victories, while Gossner would achieve eight victories and lead *Jasta* 77b until war's end (HAC/UTD)

On 24 March 1918, Ltn d R Theodor Rumpel was severely wounded in the right shoulder and just managed to make it back to the *Jasta* 23b aerodrome. Rumpel is seen here with his green Albatros D V, which clearly displays the *Staffel* marking on the tail. He survived the war with five confirmed victories, and served in the Luftwaffe in World War 2 (HAC/UTD)



burning on a field. I myself could not observe this as I was attacking another opponent who, after about 200 shots, went down in flames. It fell and crashed into a little stand of trees. This was also observed by Gefr Sonneck. The other SPADs had dispersed in the combat, so I went after another. I could not do anything more though, because I had expended all my cartridges.

'The day before, I was able to down a Sopwith biplane near Barisio. Within ten days, I had increased my victory tally from nine to fourteen.'

On 26 March, Windisch and *Jasta* 66 received congratulations from *Kogenluft* for their successes. Three days later Windisch was awarded the 'Hohenzollern'. In succeeding days, he led his *Staffel* in hazardous attacks on French troops in support of German infantry. The *Kommandeur der Flieger* (*Kofl*) of the 7. *Armee* cabled the unit with his praise;

'I give my full acknowledgment to the *Jagdstaffel* for intervening in the ground combat today. The troops are full of praise for their support by the fliers. The captured Frenchmen – approximately 900 – have felt the machine gun attacks to be horrendous.'

After bringing his score to 20, Windisch was recommended for the *Pour le Mérite*. On 27 May, however, he was flying his brand new Fokker D VII (OAW) 2035/18 when he was shot down just behind the French lines and was believed to have been taken prisoner. His status unclear to the German authorities, he was still awarded the 'Blue Max' on 6 June. However, Windisch never returned, his fate lost in the chaos of the war and its aftermath.

The stepped-up aerial combat accompanying the offensive allowed several pilots to claim their first victories in the coming days. Among these was a young Badener in *Jasta* 49, Ltnd R Hermann Habich. Born in Baden on 15 August 1895, Habich learned to fly at 18, obtaining his licence on 17 March 1914. When called to the colours, he entered the air service and flew with FFA 47 in 1915. Habich's outstanding achievements as a pilot earned him promotion to *vizefeldwebel* and then *offizier-stellvertreter*, and he was awarded the Silver Karl Friedrich Military Merit Medal from his home state of Baden on 14 October 1916.

Habich left FFA 47 for a posting to the Eastern Front with FA (A) 215 in March 1917. On 19 July he forced a Russian Nieuport to land behind its own lines, but received no confirmation of a victory. By 11 December Habich had returned to the west, where he went through fighter training at a *Jastaschule*. He arrived at the newly formed *Jasta* 49 as a *leutnant der reserve* on 8 January 1918. This unit would be commanded throughout the war by Ltnd R Franz Ray, a nine-victory pilot from *Jasta* 28.

On 19 March, *Jasta* 49 transferred from the 6. *Armee* to take up new quarters at Bruille, near Abscon, as part of the build-up of the 17. *Armee* for Operation *Michael*. It is believed that the unit became part of *Jagdgruppe* 3, which also included

Jasta 49 pilot Ltnd R Hermann Habich poses with his Albatros D III (OAW) 5127/17. This unit was equipped with several OAW-built D IIIs, and Habich's was marked with a black chequerboard pattern painted on the varnished plywood nose. The struts display the legend OAW D 3 5127, but the port wheel cover must have been a replacement item from another aircraft, as it is marked as 5129 (P M Grosz)



Jagdstaffeln 14, 20 and 40. Habich tallied his first victory on 27 March when he shot down DH 4 A7767 of No 18 Sqn, its crew of 2Lt R B Smith and 1AM H Sinclair being taken prisoner. At almost the same time, Ray shot down an RE 8. These were the first two opponents despatched by the *Staffel*, contributing to a total of 25 aircraft claimed by German aerial forces that day. Habich's victims came down at Bapaume, which had been taken by the Germans three days before.

Habich then began a long dry spell, which ended on 2 September when he downed a Breguet on the French front at Chalons-Suippes. By that time he was probably flying a D VII, and he continued to increase his score until his seventh came on 6 October. Post-war, Habich remained active in aviation, and served in the Luftwaffe in World War 2.

As mentioned, *Jagdgeschwader* I, II and III were all heavily involved in Operation *Michael*. JG II was allocated to the 18. *Armee*, although it failed to achieve any victories on the first two days of the offensive. Its component *Jagdstaffeln* 12, 13 and 19 were largely equipped with Fokker Dr Is by this time, but *Jasta* 15 (the pet unit of JG II's indomitable commander Hptm Berthold) was still flying Albatros and Pfalz biplanes. As the infantry of the 18. *Armee* advanced, so did the *geschwader*, and it occupied the old Allied airfield at Balâtre, near Roye, on 28 March. That same day two Albatros pilots in *Jasta* 15 contributed to the 22 opponents claimed by the *Jagdflieger*. Ltnd R Arthur Rahn downed a Breguet for his fourth victory, while his *Staffel* comrade Ltnd R Hugo Schäfer forced an RE 8 down behind German lines for the first of his eventual tally of 11.

Born in East Prussia on 18 July 1897, Arthur Rahn had started his fighter pilot career as an early member of *Jasta* 19. On 30 April 1917 he had participated in the destruction of five French balloons by his *Staffel*, gaining his first two victories in the process. Rahn added a Caudron on 5 May for his third. In October 1917 he transferred to *Jasta* 18, where he flew his D V alongside Paul Strähle under Berthold's stern leadership. With the other pilots, Rahn made the famous 'Berthold swap' to *Jasta* 15 just before the great offensive – he also brought along his Albatros marked with his white diamond band, and may have been flying this when he tallied his fourth victory.



During the opening days of *Kaiserschlacht*, *Jasta* 14 was an element of *Jagdgruppe* 3, along with *Jasta* 49. One of the better *Jasta* 14 pilots was Vfw Paul Rothe, here flanked by his groundcrew. His D Va bore a very dark-painted fuselage, and a personal marking of a man-in-the-moon emblem. The *Staffel* marking was a horizontal white/black line from nose to tail, but here the black line underneath the white portion has vanished into the dark fuselage colour. Rothe achieved five victories (courtesy R Zankl)



Ltnd R Arthur Rahn flew this Albatros D V under Berthold's command in *Jasta* 18, and apparently took it with him to *Jasta* 15 when Berthold assumed control of JG II. It was marked in typical 'Berthold colours' of dark blue fuselage and red nose – the upper surface of both wings was apparently dark blue as well. Rahn's familiar personal emblem of a white diamond band was painted on the dark blue portion of the fuselage, but switched to reversed colours on the light blue underside of the fuselage (P M Grosz)

On 29 March 1918 Rahn transferred back to his old *Jasta* 19 within JG II, where he would add his final two kills in a Fokker Dr I. He was wounded on 17 July and did not return to action, although Rahn survived the war and later emigrated to the USA.

The advance of the German ground forces during Operation *Michael* had spent itself on 28 March, but the aerial conflict over the battleground continued in its intensity. One typical *Amerikaprogramm Jagdstaffel* under the control of the 2. *Armee* was Bavarian *Jasta* 76, which made its presence known on 3 April when its commander, Ltnd R Walter Böning, scored the unit's first victory during the Offensive. Böning was credited with a Camel for his own 14th kill, which was probably D1797 from the newly-formed RAF's No 54 Sqn – its pilot, 2Lt R T Cuffe, was unhurt after he force-landed near St Pol.

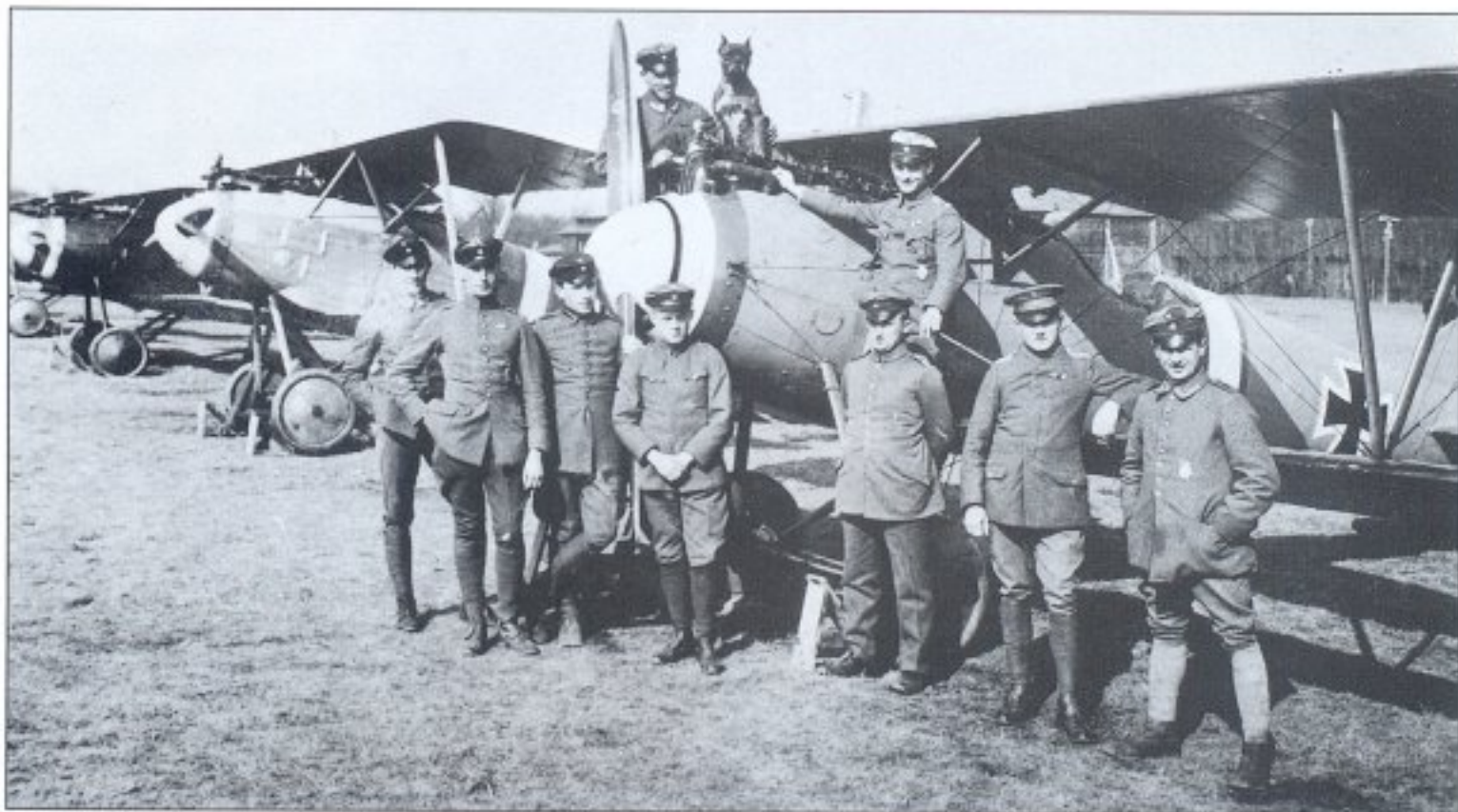
A schoolmaster's son from the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg, Böning had been a medical student in Erlangen, Bavaria, in the spring of 1914. While attending the university, he joined the 19th Bavarian Infantry Regiment that was based in the town, and thus he went off to war with the Bavarians, and remained closely associated with them throughout the war. Böning's courageous actions under a French bombardment on 7 May 1915 earned him Bavaria's Gold Bravery Medal and a promotion to *offizier-stellvertreter*.

He won a transfer to aviation as a *leutnant der reserve* in February of 1916, and joined the Bavarian formation FFA 6b on 25 May. There, Böning earned his pilot's badge and further decorations before he was posted to the new *Jasta* 19, which was still in the process of forming up. It was with that unit that he achieved his all-important initial victory during the sixth day of 'Bloody April'. Böning continued his sterling service, finally bringing his tally to six on 23 September 1917 when he bagged two Nieuports from *Escadrille* N96.

Such achievements meant he was destined for greater things, and the Bavarians tapped Böning to command the brand new *Jasta* 76b, which began to form up at Habsheim, in Alsace, in November. Böning assembled and trained his little group of eight pilots, the most promising of whom was Ltnd R Hans Böhning, a 24-year-old Bavarian from *Jasta* 36 with four recorded victories (the similarity between Böhning's name and his commander's have caused confusion, but they were not related).

Oblt Hasso von Wedel also flew in *Jasta* 14, but he attained his five victories later in different units. Von Wedel's pristine *Jasta* 14 Albatros D Va sits in a snowy field. The fuselage was also overpainted in a solid colour, but it seems a circle of varnished plywood was left unpainted to serve as a background for the pilot's famous *Richtrad* personal emblem. The *Richtrad* was a medieval execution device that was used in the von Wedel family coat of arms. The wings of this machine were covered in five-colour printed camouflage fabric (HAC/UTD)





Ltn d R Walter Böning (standing, fourth from left) and his men of *Jasta 76b* pose with an Albatros D Va. Vfw Siegfried Walther is seen behind the engine with the *Staffel* bulldog, and Ltn Wallerth (a visiting observer) has climbed up on the port wheel. Standing, from left to right, are Uffz Diem, Ltn Bärenfanger, Vfw Hüttner, Böning, Ltms Hertrich, Zahlmeister and Schweppech and Vfw Karl Hopf. The *Staffel* nose markings were white and blue, and there were two variations of this nose banding. The bands seen on the fuselages were likely blue-bordered white as well (N W O'Connor)

Ltn d R Hans Böhning scored one victory with Bavarian *Jasta 76* before moving on to command *Jasta 79b*, where he would raise his tally to 12. The Albatros D Va seen behind him is probably a *Jasta 76b* aeroplane, and the fuselage was marked in two-colour stripes. Contrary to previous interpretations, there was no 'ace of spades' emblem on the fuselage, simply the usual Iron Cross insignia. The fin was painted a solid colour (HAC/UTD)

By the time *Jasta 76b* was transferred to Liéramont in the 2. *Armee* on 18 March, it had attained 11 victories (seven of them by Böning) in exchange for the loss of three pilots killed. After scoring one of those 11, Hans Böhning was posted out to take command of *Jasta 79b*, where he would bring his score to 17 flying Pfalz and Fokker fighters.

Following his Camel victory on 3 April, Böning knocked down another British fighter on the 11th, but it was not a day for celebration in his *Staffel*. At about 1825 hrs he destroyed an SE 5a northwest of Albert – this was probably C5445, flown by Capt K Crawford of No 60 Sqn, who was killed. At about the same time, Uffz Diem of the *Jasta* forced an RE 8 to land, but tragedy struck simultaneously. Two novice pilots of the unit were lost in five minutes. At 1820 hrs Ltn d R Richard Emmerich's Albatros D Va 5726/17 went down in flames after he attacked an RE 8 near Albert. At 1825 hrs Uffz Gottfried Stemmler's D Va 7249/17 was also sent down burning.



The mixed fortunes of the *Staffel* continued for the next seven weeks, as the unit lost another pilot killed, two wounded and another made a PoW, while only one victory was achieved. On 30 May, Böning balanced accounts when he despatched Camel D6483 from No 3 Sqn (Lt C P Macklin killed in action) and also destroyed D1793 from No 43 Sqn over Contalmaison (2Lt P T Bruce was also killed in action). In addition, a third Sopwith went down to Vfw Georg Markert, making this the best day ever for the *Staffel*.



This stunning photograph of Ltn d R Walter Böning's D Va is worth repeating. By the time this shot was taken, the aircraft had almost certainly been taken over by Vfw Karl Hopf, who is seen here balancing precariously on the cockpit sill. Hopf was a Bavarian native of Würzburg, and it is the crest of that city which appears beneath the cockpit (no doubt added by Hopf). The Bavarian blue and white diamond pattern covered the aft fuselage and vertical tail surfaces, while the tailplane bore the *Staffel* markings of blue and white stripes

However, the next day the *Jasta* luck turned black. In a fierce scrap with SE 5as, Böning's left lower leg was hit, shattering the bone. He somehow managed to land his Albatros D Va 5765/17 back at his airfield with his 'last strength and skill'. In the same fight, Vfw Markert was shot down at 1815 hrs, falling in flames at Fricourt. In Böning's absence, the *Jasta* soldiered on under different leaders, and was still flying the Albatros D Va at the end of June.

Böning's lengthy recovery meant he would not return to the front. While in a hospital in his hometown of Oldenburg, he received the Duchy's House and Merit Order. Böning proved to be the only aviation recipient of that high award.

OPERATION GEORGETTE

The High Command's attempt to separate the British and French armies had failed, but further assaults were still planned. On 9 April, the focus shifted north to the 4. and 6. *Armee* sectors when Operation *Georgette* commenced. Also known as the Battle of the Lys, its aims were to launch the 6. *Armee* to capture Armentières and the high point of Mont des Cats, while the 4. *Armee* assaulted the French and took the high ground of Mt Kemmel. After another tremendous artillery barrage, nine German divisions attacked at 0845 hrs, again advancing through a thick fog.

At Halluin, on the 4. *Armee* front, Paul Strähle and his *Jasta* 57 were able to fly directly over the battlefield by the time the weather cleared slightly on 10 April. Strähle's war diary entry for the 10th reports that his Albatros pilots flew over the 'newly conquered area southwest of Armentières', and reported 'enemy machine gun fire as well as quick firing flak guns. Very exciting flight at low height – one can distinguish every man, although finding one's way is very difficult. Many columns on the la Bassée-Estaires road, and balloons also in dangerous positions. In front many troops and cavalry. Wounded being carried. The Lys bridges had been blown up. A makeshift bridge had been built. Owing to the bad weather, no enemy aerial activity.'

On 16 April, Strähle reported that during a lengthy patrol his *Jasta* made an 'intermediate landing at British aerodrome at la Gorgue, near Estaires. There, we still found much fuel. On the field were the burnt remains of about a dozen Camels destroyed before the retreat. La Gorgue was heavily damaged during the offensive. Behind the aerodrome we visited the defences hurriedly thrown up by the British. It was mainly Portuguese troops in this area.' The Camels were from No 208 Sqn, and unit CO, Maj C Draper, had ordered them burnt on



the 9th when they were grounded by fog and the German advance was imminent. Twenty-four hours later, Strähle was finally able to end his lengthy dry spell and contribute to a great day for *Jasta* 57. He was flying his red-nosed Albatros D III (OAW) 2385/17 as he led six of his pilots over Armentières. Strähle sighted flak bursts, and later noted;

'I followed them, but did not find anything. Near Doulieu, I dropped below the clouds and spotted some British machines close to the lines. I hurried over and engaged one of them, which flew into the middle of our patrol and was shot down by Jensen at Petit des Bois.

'At about the same moment I fired at an RE 8 and sent him down beside the Vieux-Berquin-Strazeele road. Almost immediately my machine was hit repeatedly, the damage including one gun and the radiator. I zoomed and was at once attacked by four British single-seaters. I returned their fire and the leader went down in a vertical dive, hitting the ground five seconds later northeast of Vieux Berquin. The remaining Camels seemed to have had enough, but they came back and made quite a scrap out of it. I think my red nose made quite an impression on them. We all landed on the forward aerodrome at Bleu, I to have my damaged radiator repaired.'

Strähle went on to recount how Uffz Meyer shot down another Camel and Vfw Otto Wieprich destroyed an SE 5a which had pursued him into the clouds. 'A good day for once', wrote Strähle. 'Five Tommies fewer!'

In spite of the glamorous notoriety of the Fokker Dr I due to its use by the elite *Jagdgeschwader*, the fact is that during the massive German offensives of March and April 1918, most of the burden of aerial fighting fell on Albatros pilots. The statistics compiled at the end of April are revealing. No fewer than 928 Albatros D Va fighters were recorded in the frontline inventory, as well as 174 Albatros D IIIs and 131 Albatros D V machines. In contrast, there were 433 Pfalz D IIIa fighters and just 171 Fokker Dr Is reported. Of the 1949 fighters in use, fully 47.6 percent were Albatros D Va machines – this was the zenith of the type's deployment in the war. Albatros fighters in total made up more than 63 percent of all scouts at the front.

In the compilation of fighter aircraft for 30 April 1918, 19 examples of a new type were first noted – the superb Fokker D VII. Once the *Jasta*

Staffelführer of *Jasta* 57 Paul Strähle (at left with back to camera) points out salient details of his D V 4594/17 to one of his men. The aircraft had, by this time, been considerably overpainted in the usual *Jasta* 57 light blue, which appeared darker than the underside blue due to the original dark undercoat. The red band around the fuselage aft of the cockpit was an additional indicator of the commander's aircraft (HAC/UTD)

pilots became acquainted with the D VII, it seemed no other aircraft would do. The hard-pressed fighter pilots battled on through the failed Chemin des Dames Offensive (launched on 27 May), the Battle of the Matz between Montdidier and Noyon (9 June) and finally the so-called Operation *Friedensturm* (15 July). Throughout these weeks, the number of Albatros fighters in service was gradually diminishing, giving way to the Fokker D VII.

Paul Strähle and his *Jasta* 57 had to wait for their Fokkers longer than some other units. On 16 May 1918, Strähle was flying his old D V 4594/17 as he led his *Staffel* back to base from an uneventful sortie. He had first flown this machine on 5 October 1917 in *Jasta* 18, and it had rendered long and faithful service. Strähle wrote;

'I was gliding homeward, heading for our airfield. Suddenly, I realised that the motor has cut out. I tried to pump up the pressure in the fuel tank, but it was of no use. All of a sudden the propeller stopped. I tried to turn on the emergency tank and to pump pressure into it in an effort to restart the propeller, but without success. I was forced to make an emergency landing without a large choice of landing area as my Albatros was only 50 metres above the ground. I flew towards a field filled with shell craters, trenches, wire barricades, telephone posts and other obstacles – there was no other choice, as houses were everywhere.

'Upon landing, I struck the telephone wires and wire entanglements and I smashed my right wing. At the same time I hit a telephone pole on my left, which I completely chopped down. With a loud crash, my Albatros landed upside down and my head struck the top wing. Slowly, I crawled out of the aeroplane – very carefully so that I would not become entangled in the mess of wires.'

Strähle's old D V was a complete write-off, but he came through with little more than a few bumps on his head. On 19 May he was back in action in his D III (OAW) 2385/17, shooting down a DH 9 from No 206 Sqn – his pilots brought down three more. However, during the combat Strähle's D III suffered 16 hits, including two in the engine. He had to glide back home covered in oil and water, but landed safely. Strähle then switched to D Va 7401/17, and scored his final Albatros victory on 24 June. He stalked another DH 9 and engaged it at an altitude of 2500 metres;

'I attack the English aeroplane a second time, and its nose turns up and I can see two pieces breaking off his wing. Now the machine is diving down and the pilot and observer are thrown out of the craft.

Paul Strähle's faithful D V 4594/17 finally met its end after more than seven months of frontline flying in two different *Jagdstaffeln*. On 16 May 1918 he wrote it off south of Menin during a forced landing. Note the barbed wire entanglements in the foreground and the *Balkenkreuz* insignia on the underside of the broken wingtip, which was apparently painted light blue. Strähle wrote, 'It was a complete crash, but I escaped with only a few bumps on my head and nothing more'





This Albatros D Va of *Jasta 17* was flown by Ltn d R Alfred Fleischer, who marked it with his 'F' monogram and a dark diamond band. The *Staffel* marking of a black(?) rudder and white vertical tail section was still then in use

The English aircraft subsequently hits the ground approximately 1.5 kilometres east of Montdidier.'

Strähle finally received a D VII at the end of July, and went on to score 14 or 15 victories in all. He lived until 1985, and was a generous and enthusiastic resource for many historians (including this author).

The long-term use of Albatros machines by *Jasta 57* was not unique. On 30 June 1918 there were still 604 Albatros D Va in the frontline inventory, as opposed to 407 Fokker D VII's. Even 91 of the old D V and 82 D III's remained in service. The D Va would continue to fight on in quantity, especially in the less active areas and in low-priority units. Even a veteran unit like *Jasta 17* was flying the Albatros D Va in late June, and determined pilots could still gain victories with the old machines. Ltn d R Alfred Fleischer had joined the unit on 30 May, but had yet to score. He was flying a D Va (which he casually calls a 'D V') when he chalked up his first victory on 29 June;

'We were flying seven Albatros D Vs in the direction of Soissons when suddenly I observed a SPAD squadron crossing our path at about 1000 metres below. To attract the attention of my *Staffelführer*, as well as my other comrades, I tipped my wings and began shooting phosphorous ammunition, but no one responded. I then left the *Staffel* and, in a dive, singly attacked the seven SPADs. After firing my first burst, a SPAD went up almost vertically, and with my second attack he burst into bright flames and disappeared into the abyss. The ruckus had attracted my own squadron, and, as they approached us, the other SPADs took to flight.'

Fleischer would achieve five more victories while flying a Fokker D VII.

The last known frontline inventory was compiled on 31 August 1918, and there were still 307 D Va aircraft recorded at the front, along with 52 D III's and 20 old D V fighters. However, almost none of the elite *Jagdgeschwader* pilots or the successful aces in other *Staffeln* were still flying Albatros machines by that time.

Although records for the final two months of the war are fragmentary at best, it is certain that some D Va fighters served right on to the Armistice. When the orders came to turn over certain single-seaters to the Allies, more than a few weary Albatros machines were among them. Despite not being as legendary as Fokker's Dr I triplane or as impressive as the same manufacturer's D VII, the Albatros fighters' impact on aerial conflict in the final two years of the war was significant indeed.

APPENDICES

COLOUR PLATES

All of the art in this section was created by Harry Dempsey, who patiently worked with the author to illustrate the aeroplanes, and their colours, as accurately as circumstances will permit. The markings portrayed are approximations at best, and many details are provisional, and are duly noted as such. The author owes a great debt to the research of such authorities as Alex Imrie, Manfred Thiemeyer, Michael Schmeelke, Ray Rimell and Bruno Schmaling. The valuable assistance of Dan-San Abbott, Rick Duiven and Terry Phillips is also appreciated.

1

Albatros D II (serial unknown) of Oblt Kurt Student, Jasta 9, Leffincourt, February 1917

This D II featured a black/white quartering as the pilot's personal insignia. The plywood-covered fuselage was probably natural varnished. The upper surface of the wings and tailplane/elevator were probably camouflaged in dark olive green, a light Brunswick green and reddish or chestnut brown (or Venetian red) colours. The rudder appears to have been painted in one of the camouflage colours, possibly the light green. The undersides of the wings and tailplanes were painted light blue, and this undersurface colour was also probably applied to the wheel covers. All metal cowling panels and interplane struts were painted in factory finish grey or grey-green. Mud guards were affixed above the wheels in some of the photographs of this aircraft.

2

Albatros D II (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Wilhelm Leusch, Jasta 19, Les Mesnil, April 1917

Leusch's D II featured his 'L' monogram applied in the characteristic style of Jasta 19. Since the rear fuselage of this machine is not visible in the photograph, much of the finish shown here remains speculative. The aircraft bore standard colours as described for Student's Albatros. It was fitted with a two-piece windscreen and a rear-view mirror mounted in the centre section. The rudder is provisionally depicted as dark green, with the Albatros logo applied. Leusch achieved his first victory on 12 May 1917, and he subsequently added four more to his tally. He would also eventually command the *Staffel* in 1918.

3

Albatros D II (serial unknown) of Ltn Emil Meinecke, Ottoman Fliegerabteilung 6, Chanak-Kale, Summer 1917

Meinecke was a German pilot posted to FA 6 in the Dardanelles in December 1916. Scoring his initial victory in a Fokker E III on 27 January 1917, he occasionally flew this Turkish-marked D II, but it is unknown if he achieved any of his six confirmed claims in the type. It is recorded that three D IIs were sent to the Turkish front in July 1917, where they

received the numbers AK D1 through AK D3. These numbers were marked on the top white border of the black fuselage square, but it cannot be discerned which was applied to this aircraft. The fuselage and fin were either painted or stained a dark colour – probably reddish-brown – while the fuselage underside was light blue. Wings and tailplane were probably left in the three-colour German camouflage.

4

Albatros D III 1958/16 of Oblt Paul von Osterroht, Jasta 12, Epinoy, March 1917

Von Osterroht's D III bore a varnished ply fuselage and grey or grey-green metal panels, struts and wheel covers. The personal marking was a black and white quartering painted on the fuselage. The wings and tailplane displayed factory three-colour camouflage and light blue undersides.

5

Albatros D III (serial unknown) of Offz Stv Friedrich Altemeier, Jasta 24, Annelles, Summer 1917

Altemeier's personal insignia was the three intertwined circles of the Krupp Arms Works. This was most likely applied to the varnished plywood fuselage in black and white. The fuselage of this aircraft appears quite dark in photographs, and it may have been stained reddish-brown. However, the author believes it was a natural-varnished warm yellow or light brown plywood which photographed as a dark shade on orthochromatic film. The rudder was clear-doped fabric, and it too displayed the Albatros logo. The wheels were also dark, and may have been painted in the reddish-brown camouflage colour. The wings and tail bore three-colour camouflage. Small auxiliary bracing struts were fitted at the bases of the vee-struts.

6

Albatros D III 2041/16 of Ltn d R Ernst Hess, Jasta 28w, Wasquehal, August 1917

Hess's combat reports from his fourth victory through to his fourteenth consistently describe this aircraft as having a green fuselage aft of the cockpit and the *Staffel* marking of a yellow and black striped tailplane. While no photographs of this machine have as yet been uncovered, it is provisionally illustrated based on photos of other Jasta 28 aeroplanes. The wings were probably camouflaged in standard colours.

7

Albatros D III 643/17 of Oblt Robert Greim, Jasta 34b, Mars la Tour, Summer 1917

Greim's personal marking consisted of a very dark disc on the fuselage sides and top. This has been interpreted as red due to Greim's later use of two red fuselage bands as personal markings, but black is also a possibility. Bavarian Jasta 34 had

not yet adopted the silver-white fuselage colour that later identified the *Staffel*, and this aircraft otherwise displayed only a factory finish.

8

Albatros D III 2092/16 of Ltn d R Richard Wenzl, Jasta 31, Mars-sous-Bourcq, June 1917

Wenzl previously flew 2092/16 in a factory finish distinguished only by his usual black and white fuselage band. At some point this same Albatros D III (apparently) was overpainted with a very distinctive mottled and speckled camouflage, which extended at least to the top wing upper surfaces. The colours that are depicted in this artwork are entirely speculative, consisting of a dark greenish mottle over light blue.

9

Albatros D III (serial unknown) of Oblt Eduard Dostler, Jasta 34, Mars la Tour, circa April 1917

Dostler's only personal marking was a simple white vertical band immediately ahead of the fuselage cross. This machine had a clear-doped rudder displaying the Albatros logo and a standard finish.

10

Albatros D III (serial unknown) of Ltn Joachim von Bertrab, Jasta 30, Phalempin, Summer 1917

This controversial D III most certainly had a black fuselage, as the pilot is confirmed as later flying a black D V. The depiction of the comet emblem on the fuselage side is much more subjective, and remains an arbitrary interpretation. This D III originally had a central radiator in the top wing, but it may have had this changed later, as shown in the planform view (p.59). The pattern of camouflage shown on the top wing remains speculative.

11

Albatros D III 760/17 of Ltn d R Hans Oblerländer, Jasta 30, Phalempin, Summer 1917

This aircraft is tentatively attributed to Oblerländer. It was marked with a black 'O' and chevron on the fuselage. Otherwise, it displayed the usual finish, with wings and tailplane upper surfaces bearing three-colour painted camouflage.

12

Albatros D III 2171/16 of Ltn d R Josef Veltjens, Jasta 14, Marchais, March 1917

This depiction is based on two very distant views, thus details are provisional. The machine was marked with the white 'Indian arrow' Veltjens made famous on his later machines, but this early version was apparently somewhat thinner. The aeroplane displayed a standard finish. The serial number is tentatively assigned, as it is based only on close examination of Veltjens' distant aircraft in the photographs.

13

Albatros D III 2274/16 of Oblt Adolf Ritter von Tutschek, Jasta 12, Epinoy, May 1917

Von Tutschek apparently painted almost the entire airframe of his D III black, probably including both surfaces of the wings.

The fuselage cross was painted over, but the cross on the tail was backed up by a white square, as were the crosses on the underside of the bottom wing. This likely applied to the crosses on the top wing as well.

14

Albatros D V 1117/17 of Ltn d R Johann Janzen, Jasta 23, Erlon by Marle, Summer 1917

Janzen's D V displayed the black swastika that was the first unit marking of this *Staffel*, before it became a Bavarian *Jasta*. Otherwise, the Albatros scout is thought to have borne only a factory finish, including painted camouflage of olive green and mauve shades on the upper surfaces of its wings and tailplane.

15

Albatros D V 1154/17 of Offz Stv Max Müller, Jasta 28, Wasquehal, August 1917

This D V had a clear-varnished fuselage with a white outlined black stylised emblem (a comet?) wrapped around the fuselage. The unit marking was a yellow tailplane with two black stripes, and the dark spinner is assumed to have been red. The pilot's 'M' markings were applied in black underneath each lower wing. The pattern of green and mauve camouflage illustrated in the planform artwork of 1154/17 (p.58) is provisional.

16

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Theodor Rumpel, Jasta 23b, Jametz, September 1917

According to Rumpel's caption for the photograph of this machine, he destroyed the 'red crate' in September 1917, apparently just after he had transferred to *Jasta* 23b. The wings appear to have been covered in five-colour lozenge fabric, and the metal cowling panels remained factory finish grey or grey-green. There was a rack for flare cartridges on the starboard cockpit side.

17

Albatros D V 4594/17 of Ltn d R Paul Strähle, Jasta 18, Houplin, circa November 1917

This long-lived D V is illustrated as it first appeared in the usual *Jasta* 18 'Berthold colours' of a red nose and dark blue fuselage and tail, with the pilot's personal white axe insignia. The underside of the fuselage was probably painted light blue, with five-colour lozenge fabric wings. The underside of both wings may also have been painted light blue at the *Staffel* as well, if Strähle's recollections are correct.

18

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Arthur Rahn, Jasta 18, Avelin, circa January 1918

Rahn's D V also displayed the unit's familiar red and blue colours. Here, the red is provisionally applied to the undercarriage and struts as well. The upper surfaces of both wings were apparently painted dark blue as well. Where the white diamond band extended onto the light blue underside of the fuselage, it reversed to black. This white diamondback may have in fact been painted on a black background between the white borders, but the illustration shows the most likely interpretation.

19

Albatros D V 4476/17 of Ltn d R Ernst Udet, Jasta 37, Phalempin, September 1917

Udet's D V had a varnished plywood-covered fuselage, with his usual LO emblem in white shadow-shaded black letters. It displayed a black spinner, and the diagonal black and white tail stripes that identified Jasta 37. Five-colour lozenge fabric covered the wings and rudder. This machine was eventually fitted with a small auxiliary bracing strut on the interplane struts, and a rack of flare cartridges on the right side of the cockpit.

20

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Ernst Udet, Jasta 37, Wynghene, Autumn 1917

As mentioned in Chapter Three, this aircraft might be an example of a small batch of silver-finished D V fighters. The entire aeroplane was painted in flat silver, with black cowling panels and spinner, and the Jasta 37 black/white stripes on wheel covers and tailplane. Black and white leader's streamers were attached to the elevator.

21

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Theodor Rumpel, Jasta 23b, Aniche, February/March 1918

Rumpel's other Jasta 23b Albatros was painted largely green on the fuselage as a reference to his former cavalry regiment. The *Staffel* marking of a white stripe with black borders was wrapped around the tail section, which displayed additional black colouring. The wings and tailplane were covered in five-colour lozenge fabric.

22

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn Heinrich Seywald, Jasta 23b, Aniche, February 1918

Seywald's D V had a black 'S' outlined in white against a black-bordered white fuselage band. The rear fuselage was decorated in the usual Jasta 23b fashion, with a black-bordered white band encircling the tail assembly. Again, the wings and tailplane were covered in five-colour fabric.

23

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Viktor Schobinger, Jasta 12, Roucourt, August 1917

Two of Schobinger's mostly black D V fighters appear at the head of the famous line-up photographs of Jasta 12 at Roucourt. As commander, he marked his D Vs with a light blue 'oblong' or cylinder emblem on the fuselage. The wings of one were painted in green and mauve camouflage, which is illustrated here.

24

Albatros D III (OAW) 5127/17 of Ltn d R Hermann Habich, Jasta 49, Bruille, March 1918

This OAW-built aircraft displayed five-colour fabric on the wings, tailplane and rudder. It had a black chequerboard pattern painted on the clear-varnished fuselage near the nose. The serial number 5127 appeared on all the struts, but the left wheel cover was a replacement item, being marked OAW D3 5129. The rounded D V style rudder and forward position of the fuselage cross were hallmarks of OAW-built D IIIs.

25

Albatros D Va of Ltn d R Walter Böning, Jasta 76b, Habsheim, circa February 1918

This aircraft was first flown by Böning as CO of the *Staffel*, then later flown by Uffz Karl Hopf. It was Hopf who added the coat of arms of his native Würzburg to the aircraft, so it is not shown here. As the commander's aircraft of a Bavarian unit, this machine was emblazoned with the Bavarian crest motif of a blue and white diamond pattern. The tailplane was marked with the Jasta marking of blue and white stripes, and the nose displayed an extension of this. The shades of blue shown in the illustration are entirely speculative, as is the pattern of green and mauve camouflage on the upper wing in the planform artwork (p.60).

26

Albatros D III (OAW) 2380/17 of Ltn d R Heinrich Arntzen, Jasta 50, Marle-Autremencourt, circa February 1918

Arntzen, a former observer, consistently used a personal emblem based on the Prussian Observer's Badge – a red-outlined black/white quartering. It is believed the unit marking of the broad chevron-style bands on the tailplane was black and white. Note the peculiar OAW rudder cross style, and the five-colour lozenge fabric on the rudder and wings.

27

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Julius Buckler, Jasta 17, Wasquehal, late September 1917

One of several D III and D V fighters flown by Buckler, this aircraft displayed the pilot's usual *Mops* name in white on a two-colour fuselage band. This is assumed to have been red and blue, but this remains provisional. The *Staffel* marking at this time was a dark tail unit, here illustrated as black. The wings were covered in five-colour camouflage fabric.

28

Albatros D V 4408/17 of Vfw Georg Strasser, Jasta 17, Rethéuil Ferme, circa December 1917

At some point the unit marking of the Jasta changed to a dark (black?) rudder, with a white fin and adjacent fuselage. In this case, Strasser marked his D V with a red (?) heart on a stylish white display, and the name *Ly*. The wings seem to have been camouflaged in green and mauve.

29

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Ltn d R Rudolf Windisch, Jasta 32b, Landreville, September 1917

Windisch's D V was beautifully decorated with black and white vertical stripes on the fuselage, and a black nose and tail. There were two white six-pointed stars on the upper wing – see planform on p.59. The specific camouflage pattern of green and mauve on the upper wing is provisional.

30

Albatros D V (serial unknown) of Obfg Kurt Schönfelder, Jasta 7, Aertrycke, early 1918

Schönfelder's D V was emblazoned with the black fuselage and tail of Jasta 7 and his personal golden star emblem. There are few details to be gleaned from the sole photograph of this aircraft, thus the lozenge fabric wings and the date and location listed are provisional.

31

Albatros D Va 5426/17(?) of Ltn zur See Gotthard Sachsenberg, MFJ I, Aertrycke, late Summer/Autumn 1917

Sachsenberg's D Va was identified by a black and white chequerboard band on the fuselage, which seems to have had a yellow border. Naval Albatros fighters were additionally camouflaged with a green and mauve stippling on the fuselage sides and top. The nose was painted yellow, as was (probably) the rudder, while the wings and tailplane retained their 'lozenge' fabric. This aircraft's serial number is reported as being 5426/17, but this is somewhat problematic as this number is not found in the MFJ I records. However, D Va 5624/17 was recorded as having been on strength, and was sent to AFP 4 on 23 March 1918. Thus it is possible one source or the other had two digits erroneously transposed.

32

Albatros D V 4594/17 of Ltn d R Paul Strähle, Jasta 57, Halluin, May 1918

This is the same aircraft as depicted in profile 17, only much later in its career. By this time it had been repainted in the standard light blue fuselage colour of Jasta 57, which appeared a bit darker than the existing pale blue undersurface, no doubt due to the underlying dark blue. The nose was still red, as was an additional fuselage band. *Balkenkreuze* were marked in all positions. It seems likely that the undersides of the 'lozenge' fabric wings were painted light blue too.

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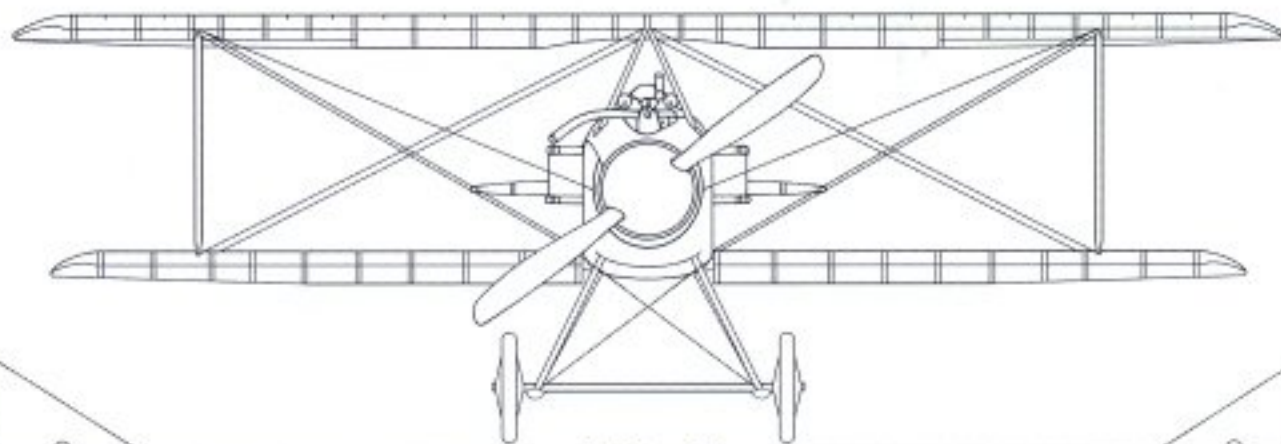
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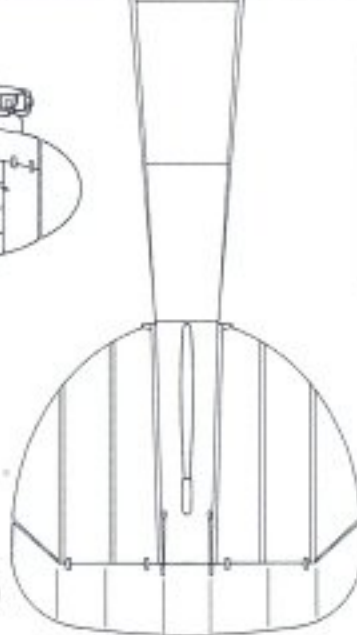
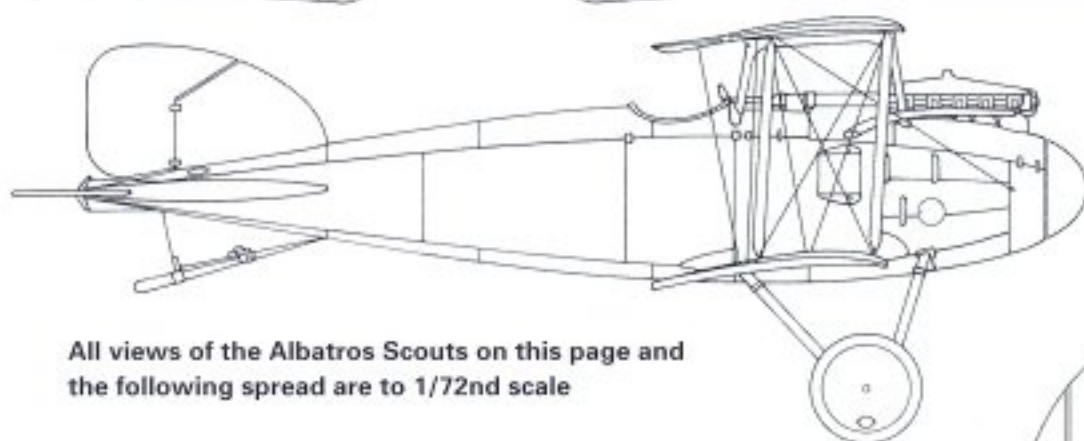
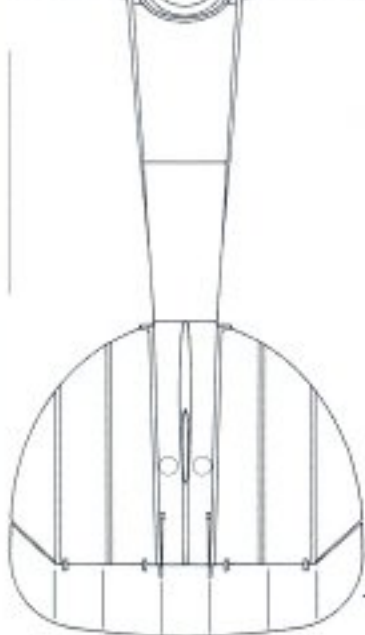
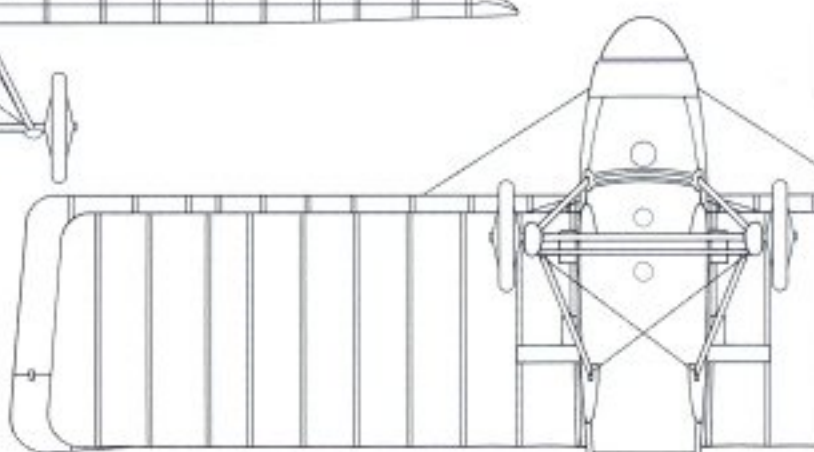
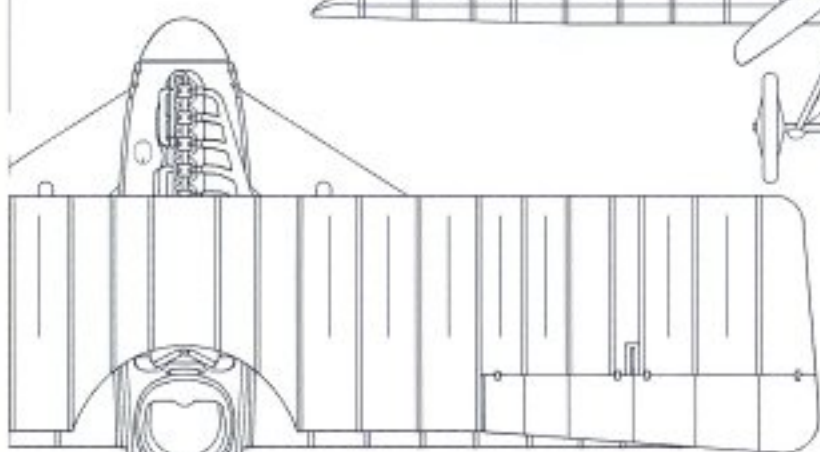
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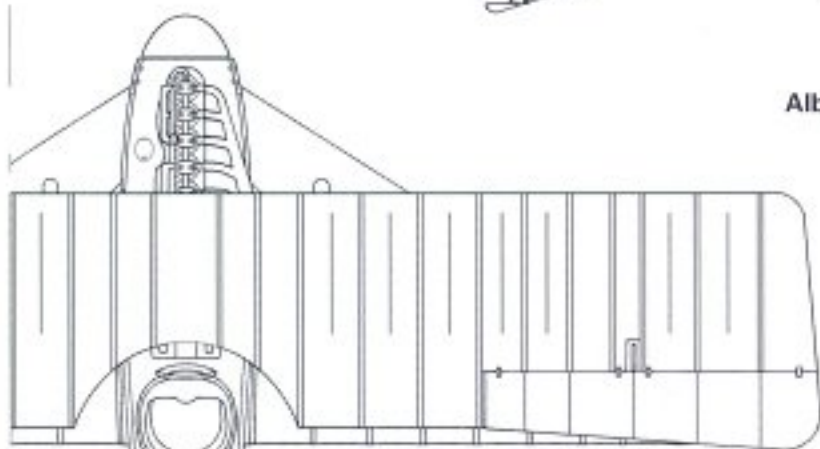
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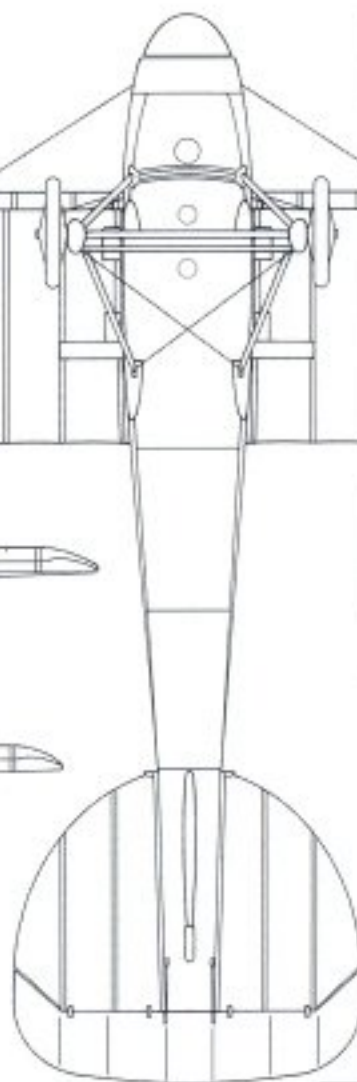
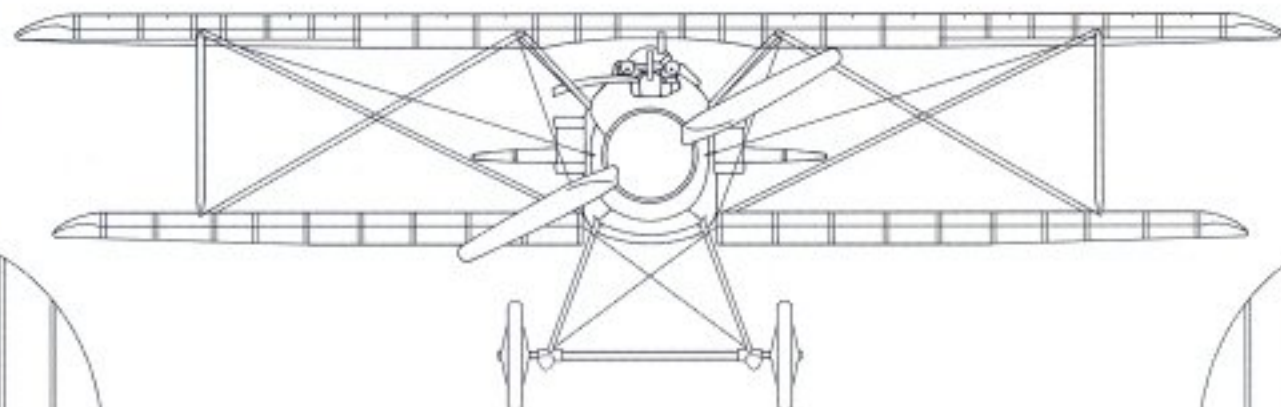
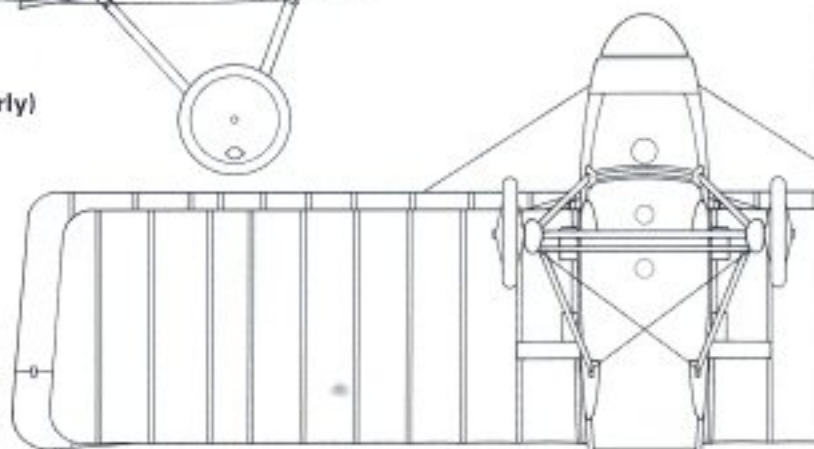
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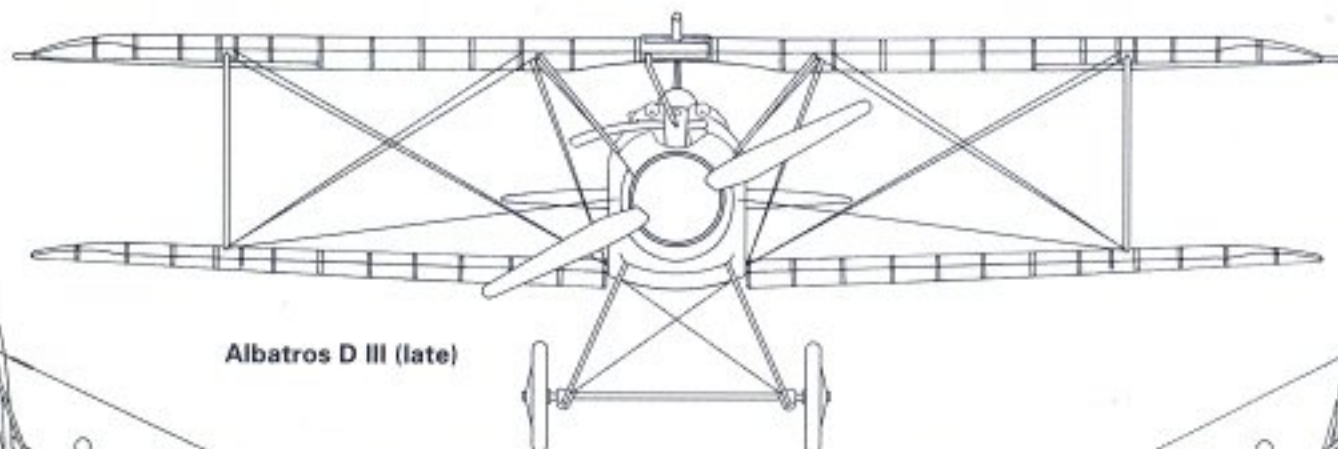


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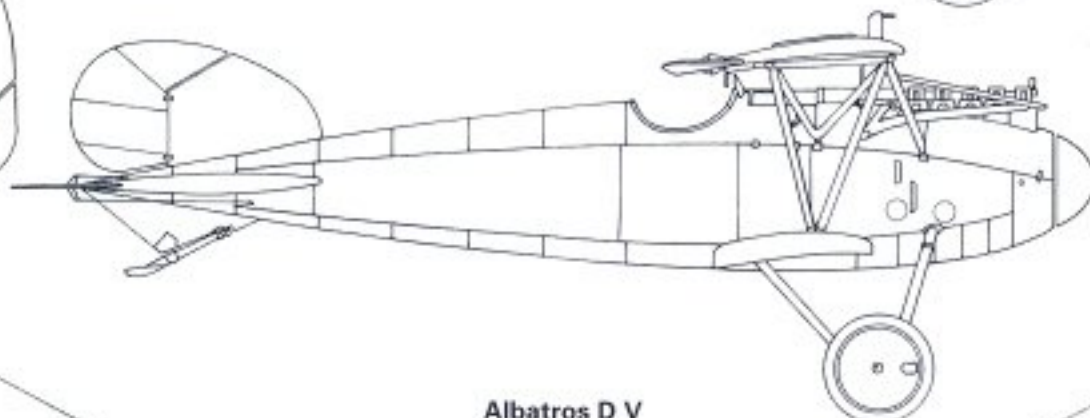
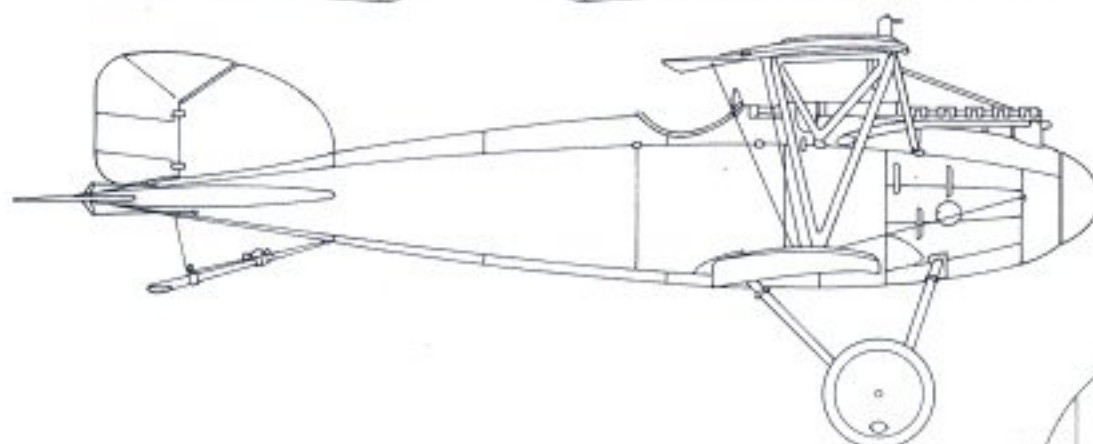
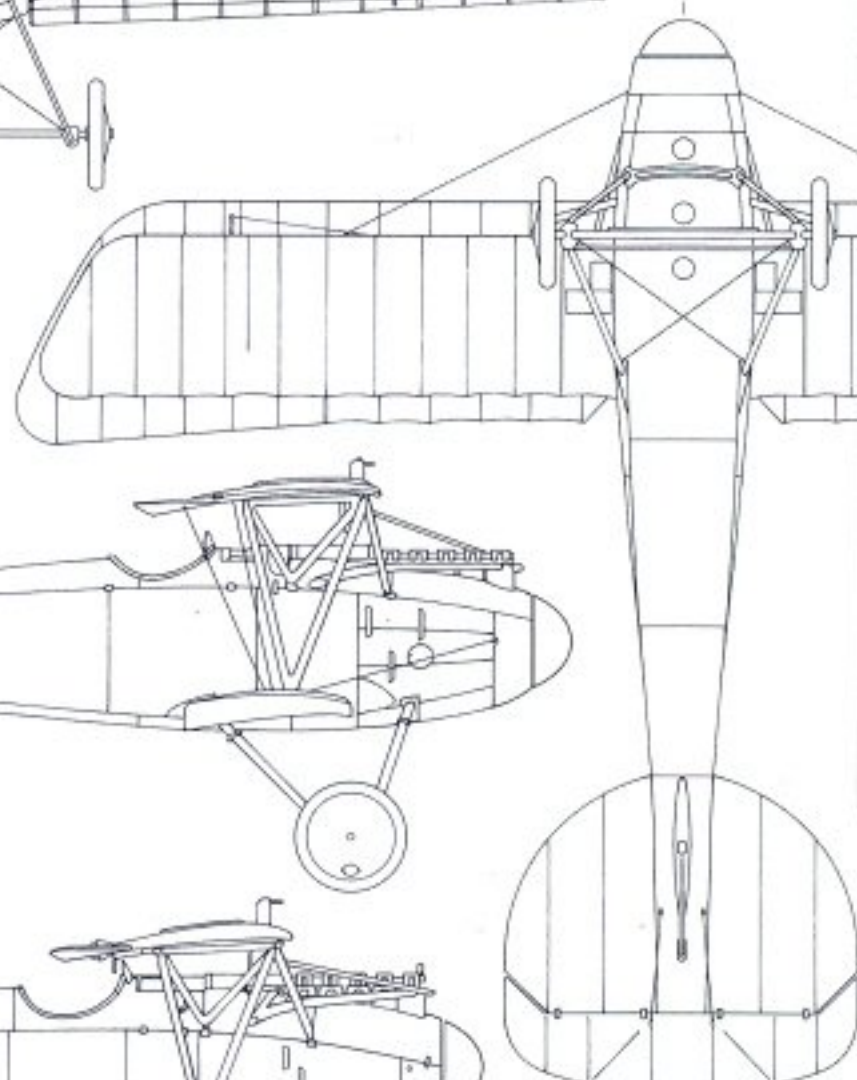
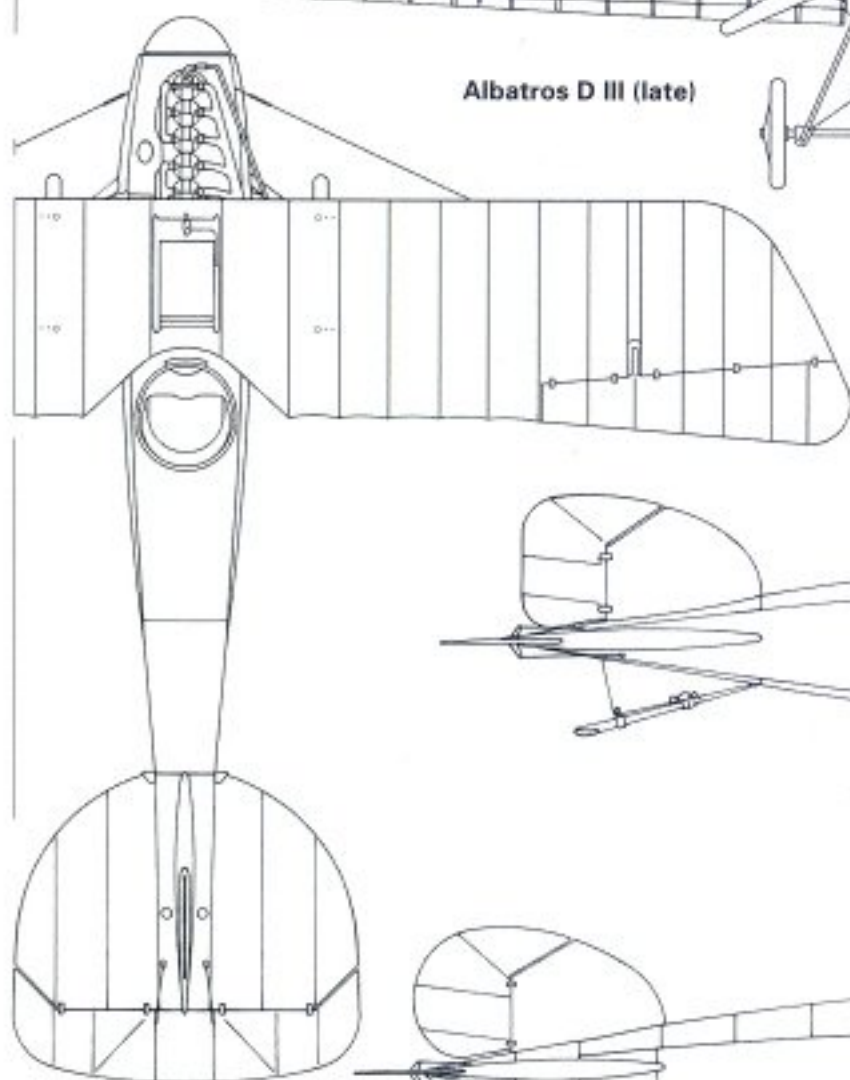


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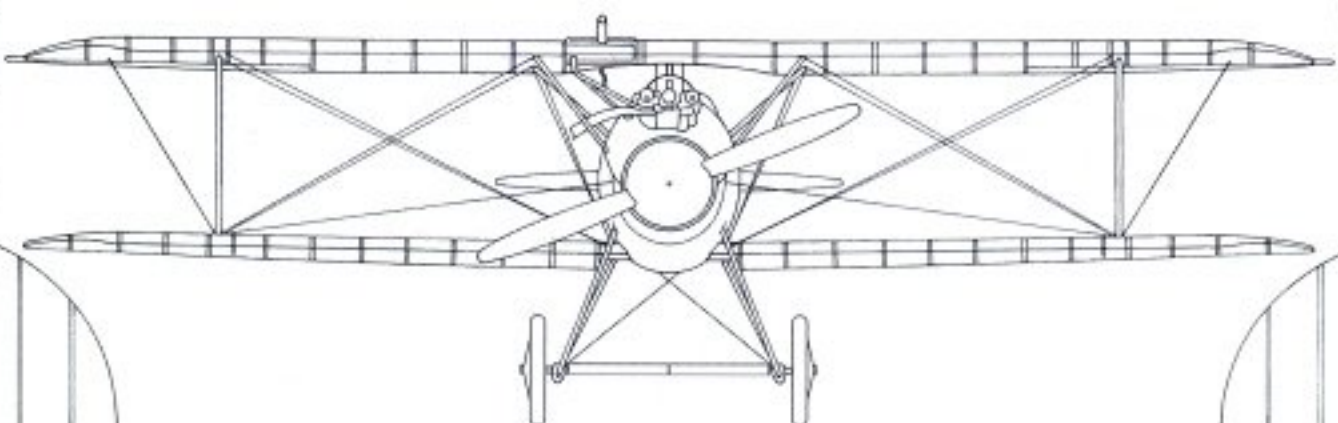
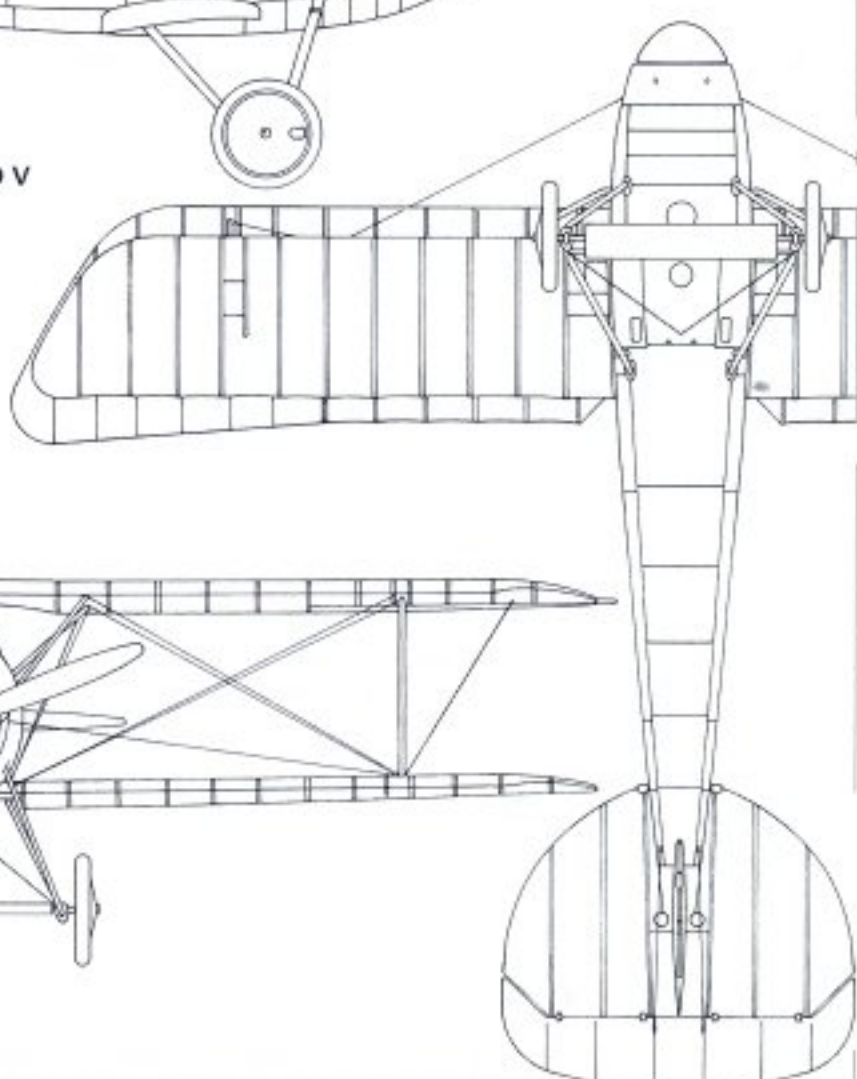
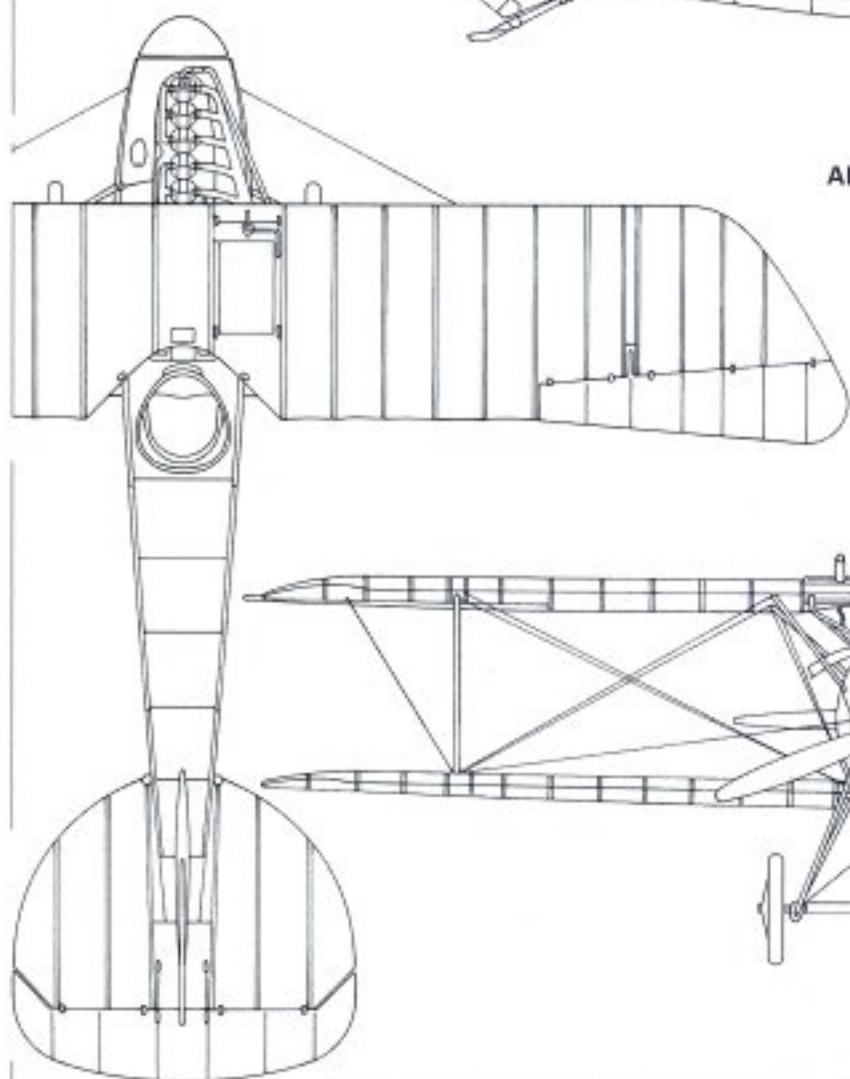


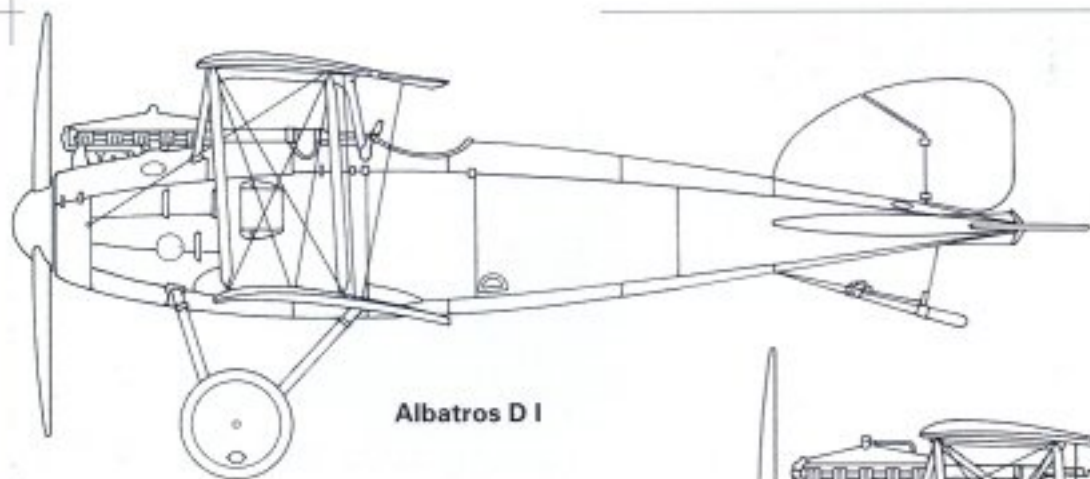


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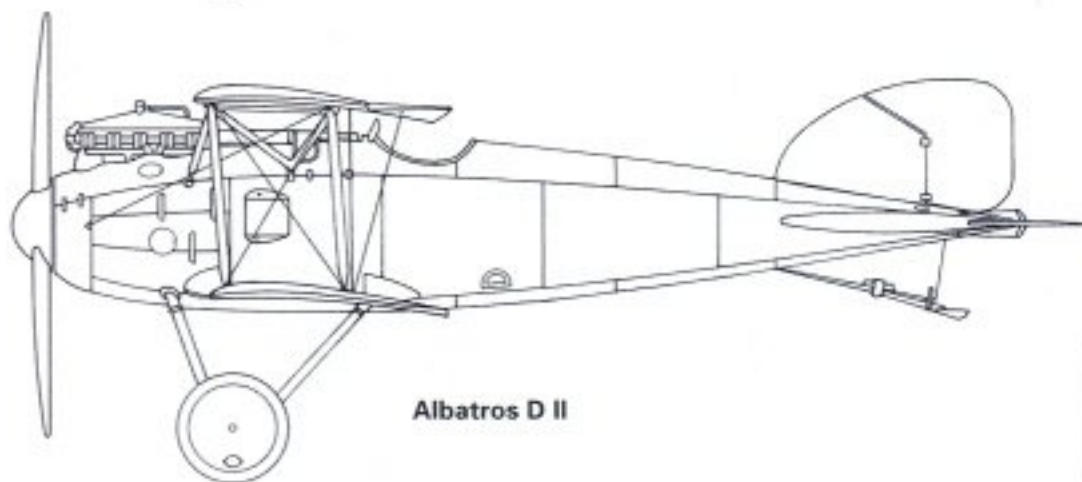


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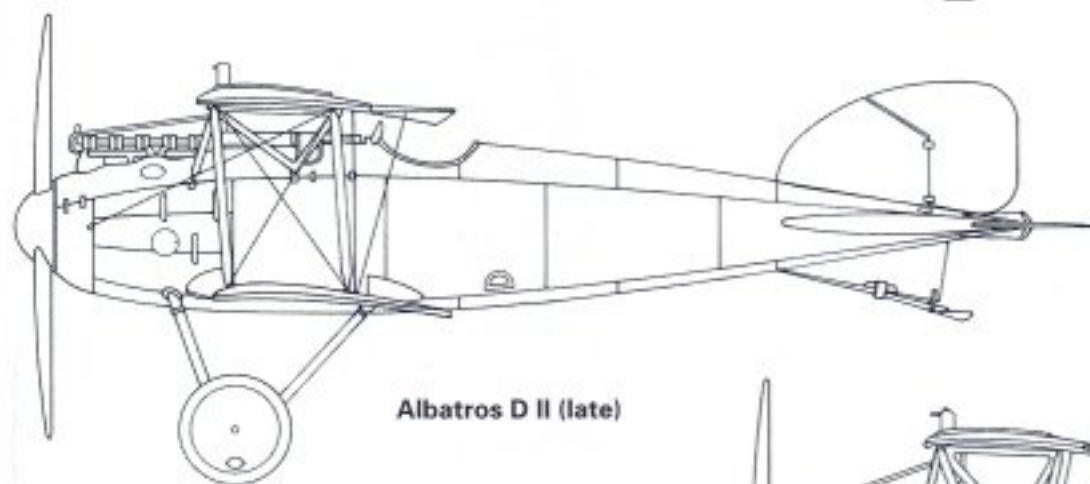




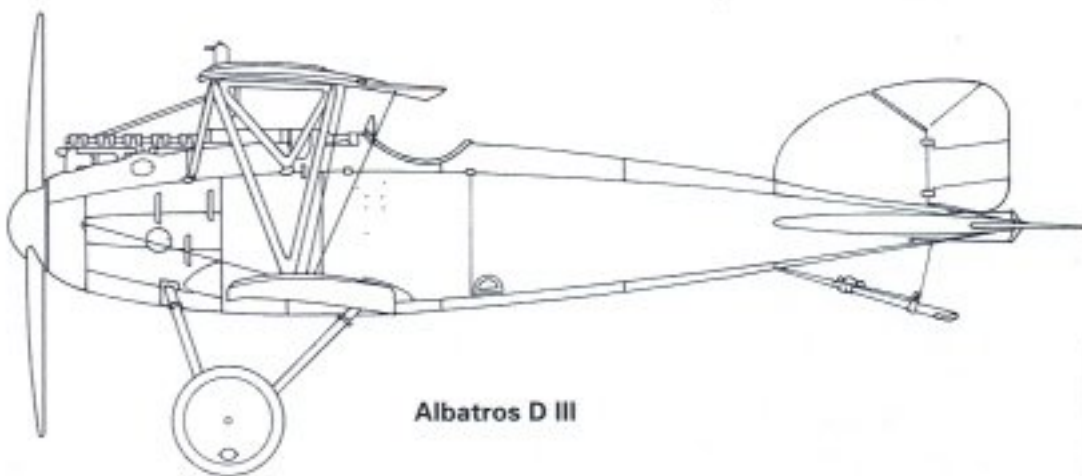
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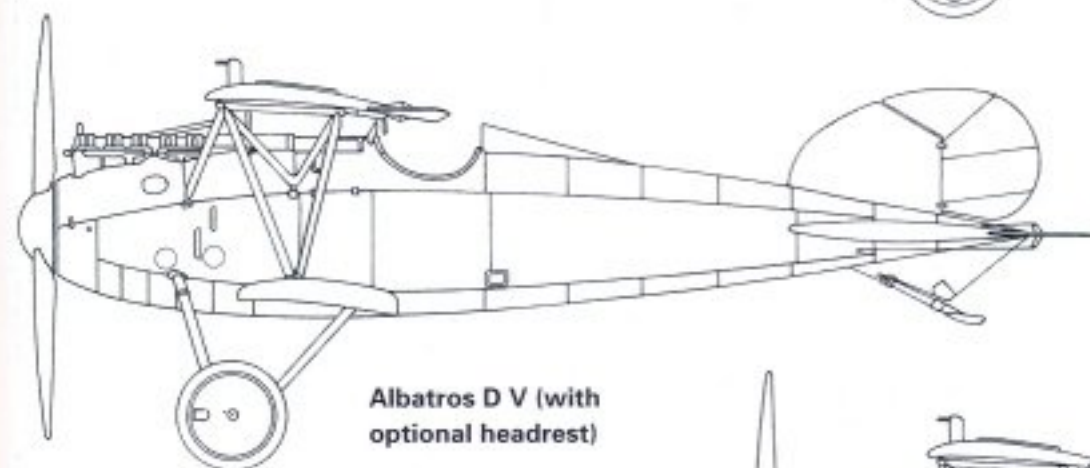
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Albatros D II (late)



Albatros D III



**Albatros D V (with
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Albatros D Va

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